The Green Scarf

by

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Tappahannock

Virginia

THE GREEN SCARF

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This was Chicago—life!

[*Page 15*]

THE GREEN SCARF

A business romance having to do with a man who is determined to win success without the help of wealth or family prestige

BY
CLYDE PERRIN
Author of *The Thunderbolt*

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Dedicated to
Charles Agnew MacLean

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CHAPTER I

IT WAS after four o'clock in the morning. The last function of commencement was over. Diplomas had been issued, and the class of 1914 was among the "grads." In the old vine-clad hall on College Street the Keys crowd were holding their last meeting. They sprawled about, collars discarded, shirts open at the throat, staring glumly into space. The atmosphere was vaguely tearful.

Pete Culver roused himself with a yawn. "Well, I s'pose triennial will see us comin' back in our private cars," he suggested.

"All but Cass," growled Big Bill Burton. "Good Lord, Tommy, what an ass you are! If *my* dad could ease me into a nice soft job, you can bet I wouldn't hesitate."

The others echoed agreement. All except "Pop" Farr — chronic in dissent. "You don't understand Tom," he drawled, rolling his eyes behind their big horn spectacles. "You're not educated enough to understand him. The trouble with you fellows is you think you're all through with life. Tom knows he's not. He hasn't got his green scarf yet."

"What d'ye mean, green scarf?" demanded "Egghead" Noyes.

Farr's eyes twinkled behind the thick lenses. Nothing pleased him like an opportunity to display erudition. "True believers, otherwise Mohammedans, are privileged to wear a green scarf on completion of a pilgrimage to Mecca," he explained.

"And what's that stuff got to do with us and Tommy?"

"Simply that you think your precious sheepskin's a reg'lar whopper of a green scarf and Tom doesn't. You fellows may come back to reunion in private cars, but Tom wants to come back in something better." With a wave of the hand, expressive of finality, Pop busied himself opening a fresh bottle of beer. He felt that he had spoken wise words.

Their object, Tommy — from now on Thomas Elgin Cass, second — sat, thoughtfully silent, his hands clasped over his knees.

He wasn't sure that he understood Pop's talk about the green scarf; Pop was always getting off things that sounded better than they were. Still, that green-scarf stuff was interesting, even a little ominous perhaps. There were perils, doubtless, on the road to Mecca.

With a sigh, he gazed around the room, scene of so many happy hours. It was all over now. One must — what had prexy said? — "put aside child-

ish things." He was a man now. On the morrow —no, by Jiminy, this very day—he must fare forth to struggle with the world.

An observer with just a little imagination would have found validity in the figure. There was a singular paladin quality about the lad, a certain knightliness in the clear candor of his blue eyes, the mild resoluteness of his lips, the thrust of his head, oddly suggestive of a gaze that saw above the heads of other men.

Tommy was not in the least conscious of any elevation. That was his charm. He was no more aware of his ideals than of his lungs. He merely used them without speculation upon their quality. He found them adequate. Life to him was not complex. One hesitated occasionally, to be sure, questioning right and wrong; there were dubious gray borderlands where one found bewilderment, sometimes even a little pain. But there were always bridges.

Pop Farr, who read Kant rather keenly for his years, puzzled Tommy by calling him a footnote to the categorical imperative. Tommy merely shied a book, and went on living. To be square and honest and clean, to keep one's body like a fine weapon, above all, to put oneself in the other fellow's shoes, these were imperatives enough. And behind this instinct to be decent was a cold ob-

stinacy, a kind of steel core in a shaft of alabaster.

There was no self-awareness about Tommy. It was characteristic that he should be amazed when his class voted him "most to be respected." He was scarcely conscious of the exquisite muscularity that had brought him his "Y." He was much less conscious of the forces in his soul that made him admired. There were poor boys about him; he had not hesitated or reasoned a moment in refusing a birthday gift of an automobile for himself. He was conscious of no particular virtue in the abnegation. It was merely his nature to act out his instincts when they were "decent"—that was a favorite word of his—and to repress them when they were not. When Pop told him the quality was rare he merely laughed. It was his unshakable conviction that the rest of the world was exactly like himself.

Tommy's first step in college struck a key from which there had been no discords thereafter. He had come down from Andover with a reputation and a liberal allowance in one hand, and in the other a profound faith that the glory of Yale lay in her democracy. Therefore, against the clamor of his friends, he had taken a room in Pierson, the habitat of the poor and undistinguished. It troubled his simple heart that his friends, despite their hearty accord with his theory, yet went to the electric lights and elevator of Garland's, nevertheless.

It was only across the street, they told him. But it was more than a street that separated them, though Tommy never suspected it.

His thoughts, as he stared at the old fireplace before which so many generations of youth had sat and dreamed, went back to that decision of four years past. It was rather curious, he thought, that he had to face something similar now. Once more fate put the question. Would he stand on his own feet, or lean? Leaning, something told him, was not "decent." Leaning was for the crippled in spirit. It was like lying abed of a morning. There was a strain in Tommy that made him afraid of comfort.

A flush of rose suddenly touched his head like a halo.

"Good Lord!" cried the Egghead, stumbling to his feet. "It's daylight!"

Farr stretched his arms. "Turn down an empty glass," he murmured softly.

"I—I——" Culver swallowed hard. "Let's t-try——" He made an effort to speak. Then he threw himself on the lounge, burying his face in the pillows. His shoulders shook.

Nothing more was said. The few who could even approximate speech felt the utter banality of words too keenly. The others could only wink rapidly and feel absurdly ashamed of the emotion

that gripped them. To all of those boys, sitting soberly in the gradually softening shadows, it was a moment of exquisite sadness. To one who has not experienced the poignancy of that moment, when lives which have grown together like the roots of young trees planted side by side, are abruptly torn asunder, perhaps forever, the pain of it may seem a little foolish, even a little droll. But to one who has experienced it, who has gone at last through that agony of formal handshaking, of trying to speak against the welling of unmanly tears, of sobbing, labored jests, it must always remain as very precious among sweet memories.

Tommy and Pop went back to their rooms together. They talked little — scattered phrases, not listened to — about the heat, the chances of the team next fall, and suchlike, calculated in irrelevance.

They held each other's hands a long time before they parted in the hall. Two big tears welled up behind the spectacles of Farr, the unemotional, and rolled down his lean cheeks.

"I — I s'pose tomorrow I'll think you're as big an ass as the next fellow, Tommy," he sniffed. "But tonight ——"

Tommy's clock went off at six-thirty as usual. And, equally as usual, he took his jog around the cemetery. That had been part of his morning rou-

tine since the day he discovered how disagreeable it was.

As he stood rubbing himself down after his shower, he began to suffer the assaults of doubt. He was to meet his family at breakfast, and there, he had resolved, he was to tell them his plans for the future.

For the first time he thought of possible unpleasantness. It had not occurred to him before that his father might be disappointed. The old gentleman was hard-headed; he might find his son's notion unsound, a trifle ridiculous perhaps. And his mother! A vague disquiet came over him. He did hope she'd understand.

He walked slowly over to the Taft, planning his method of attack. His mother would be sure to be hurt; that made him timid.

The grapefruit passed with trivialities. The eggs came and went without his broaching what was on his mind. Then Marion, his sister, gave him an opening.

"I suppose you'll come straight home," she said. "Della Rossiter's going to be there. And Pete and ——"

"No," said Tommy, staring at his plate, "I'm not coming straight home."

A quizzical smile twinkled in his father's eyes. "You're not going to work?" There was irony

in the tone, unconcealed.

"Yes," said Tommy, reddening almost guiltily. "I am."

His mother showed her surprise. "But, Tom, no vacation at all?"

"No, mother. I'm going to start right away."

His father coughed. His question was put indifferently. "Made up your mind to anything, son?"

"Yes, sir."

"The bank, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Cass' eyebrows elevated. "Prefer the ore business, eh?"

"No, sir." Tommy pushed back his chair. He realized that the time had come to be definite. "The fact is, I—I've got a job."

"You've got what?" His mother was frankly incredulous.

"A job, mother. Ten dollars a week to start. I'll——"

Marion opened her lips to interrupt, but her father motioned her to silence. He had leaned forward, studying his son through narrowed lids.

"Who got it for you, son?" he asked gently.

Tommy felt vaguely ashamed of himself. It made him stammer: "N-n-no-body, sir. There was an ad in the *Weekly*. I—wrote. The man was in New York Tuesday. I—I saw him. Bur-

roughs is his name; John W. Burroughs."

"The business?"

"Paints and that sort of thing. Pretty good concern, I guess. It's in Chicago."

"But, Tom, dear," broke in his mother, "if you liked the paint business, your father could have gotten you a position with Sherwin Williams, right in Cleveland. Couldn't you, Will?"

"Easily," said her husband.

"You don't understand, mother," explained Tommy patiently. "It isn't that I'm particularly crazy about the paint business. It—it was the advertising angle. There's a big field in advertising. This offered a chance——"

"But even advertising. You could have gotten into that, right in Cleveland, too. Why, your Uncle Albert——"

"Yes, of course. But, you see, this puts me on my own hook. I'm twenty-one now, you know. Father an' you an' Uncle Albert an', oh, everybody's been taking care of me now long enough. I want a crack at taking care of myself."

"What do you know of this Mr.—Mr.——"

"Burroughs; John W. Burroughs."

"Yes, Mr. Burroughs. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. About thirty-six, I'd say. Snappy talker, with a cold gray eye that goes

right through a fellow."

"Don't you know anything more than the color of his eyes?"

"No, mother. *He* was asking the questions—I wasn't."

"And you mean, you'll live in Chicago?"

"Yes, mother."

"On ten dollars a week? It isn't possible!"

"Lots of people do."

"But won't you come home first, just for a visit?"

"I promised to take the five-thirty out of New York tonight."

He heard his mother say something in expostulation, but his attention was fixed on his father. Mr. Cass was studying him with an expression difficult to fathom.

"Well, what do you think of it, father?" he ventured presently.

The reply was brief, almost meaningless, uttered with eyes averted. "I—I hope you'll keep me posted, son."

Tommy could not decide whether his father was pleased or not.

Tommy's thoughts were turbulent as he sat alone in the smoking compartment that night, listening to the rhythmic pound of the wheels on the track.

He was speeding into the darkness of a world

unknown. It amused him to picture himself as a knight of romance, faring forth to slaughter dragons. Only the exact nature of the dragons was exceedingly vague. And he was dubious about his weapons. He was a bonehead at figures, knew nothing at all about bookkeeping, compound interest, fractions. Gee! He wished he'd taken one of those business courses downtown, or studied a little more in general. How could he *earn* ten dollars a week?

His thoughts took a larger range. Were there temptations out there in the darkness, the same old devils he had battled with in the already distant world of boyhood? Were there the same lures for unwary feet? And what was there in life—outside—that corresponded to the "Y" of college? What was *success,* as men spelled it? How did one know when one had achieved it?

Pop Farr's image of the green scarf recurred. Did all the faithful who set out for Mecca know what they would find at the end of their pilgrimage? And if one traveled alone, how did he know when he had reached the altar of true belief? Were there signs?

Suddenly the immensity of the undertaking came over him. He saw himself in a flash, not as a paladin, full panoplied in shining armor, but as the frightened, simple-hearted lad he was. An intol-

erable loneliness assailed him. The rough fraternity of his mates, the wise, tolerant understanding of his father, the gentle affection of his mother, seemed suddenly infinitely precious and necessary. The world no longer teased him in false welcome; it was a dreary wilderness, filled with grinning shadow shapes that mocked him in his exile.

Tommy crawled into his berth that night, crushed in utter desolation, and presently he cried himself to sleep.

CHAPTER II

THE afternoon was waning. Habitations were as frequent as telegraph poles. The neat fields of Indiana had given place to the desolate loneliness of the dune country. The single track doubled, and doubled again. More tracks sprang out of nowhere. The clatter over switches and crossings was continuous.

Grass disappeared; cinders and bare earth supplanted it. Obese gas tanks, great, sprawling factories, all at loose ends, barren freight yards dotted with brooding semaphores, crowded all charm from the landscape. A dull jangle of bells in discord, the hoarse breathing of locomotives, deep, mournful whistles far away, sounded over the roar of the speeding train.

A drizzling rain was falling. Against the horizon lights began to twinkle mistily, and in the somber skies burst sudden, sulphurous meteors, lending brief majesty to the rolling smoke clouds.

The gloomy twilight settled rapidly. The flat dinginess outside became a purple blur against the car windows. The winking lamps of an electric sign flashed — and were gone. The white splendor

of a "flood-lighted" tower loomed out of the gray distance, suddenly obliterated, as the Limited, with a thundering growl, rolled into the train shed.

Tommy felt his heart contract. His lips twisted wryly at the acrid taste of smoke in his mouth. The foul breath of the monstrous place was already in his nostrils. He was afraid he was not going to like Chicago.

His father had wisely insisted upon his taking capital to tide him over until his weekly ten dollars began rolling in. So he hailed a taxi, after checking his trunk, and went to the Blackstone.

The quiet, unobtrusive elegance of the hotel rather surprised him. The unexpectedness of it was like entering the subdued charm of a fine old library after a climb over the back fence, with a stumbling progress through ashes and garbage cans.

That night he lay awake a long time, listening to the voices of the Mistress of the Lakes. Even the haughty walls of the Blackstone could not shut them out; the peremptory squawk of the motor horns, the soft clang of bells, the never-ending cough of locomotives on the Illinois Central, the gentle flutter of rain against the windows — behind all these the deep, murmurous rumble which had no name.

He awoke in the morning to a shining sun. For a moment he lay blinking, trying to grasp the reality of things. Then he saw the gray veil of soot

on the counterpane, and he chuckled grimly. The elms, twinkling in the dew, outside the old rooms in Vanderbilt, seemed very far away. The fragrance of lilac, the soft twitter of birds—all that was of a vanished past. There were no cloistered solitudes here. This was Chicago—life!

After breakfast he summoned a taxi to take him to the office of Mr. Burroughs, at a number on Diversey Parkway. It was like Chicago, he told himself, to put its factories on boulevards. It was nearly an hour before he was set down in front of the tawny brick building, with the plain wooden sign at the door marked:

CHAMPION PAINT & VARNISH CO.

"I guess I should have taken a Pullman sleeper," was his sarcastic comment to the chauffeur as he paid his fare.

The latter grinned cheerfully. "Why, boy, this ain't far out. You can go north for another six miles 'fore you get out o' the city."

His words made Tommy feel physically minute. The long ride itself had somehow brought home to him the magnitude of the task he had set for himself of "making good" in this colossus of the plains.

He sighed gently, and went up the wooden steps. The girl at the telephone switchboard looked up

from her crocheting long enough to accept his card, and put the official question: "Your business?"

Tommy reddened and said that he didn't know; he thought Mr. Burroughs was expecting him. The heightened color made his good looks better, and she smiled amiably.

He followed her down a passage, broken at intervals by frosted-glass doors. She halted before one, opening it for him. He thanked her with a shy little smile, which went straight to her heart, and entered. The door closed softly behind him.

Blinking, with the sudden light from the broad windows in his eyes, he looked at Mr. Burroughs, and Mr. Burroughs looked at him. He was not aware of this, however, for the lithe young man in the gray suit, seated at the broad desk, appeared to be intent on an examination of his fingers.

There was silence for a moment, after formal greetings had been exchanged. Then Mr. Burroughs, with a sudden movement, opened a drawer at his side and brought out a box of cigars. "Smoke?" he asked abruptly.

Tommy thanked him, at the same time taking out his own silver-mounted pigskin cigarette case. "May I have a match?"

Mr. Burroughs, staring at the glass desk pad, knocked the ash from his cigar. "I don't believe in cigarettes," he said softly.

Tommy flushed. Then he looked up, and his eyes met those of the older man squarely. "Thank you, Mr. Burroughs," he said. "I'm glad you told me."

The man in the gray suit spoke crisply: "I try to say things before—not after."

Tommy hesitated a moment; then he leaned forward and took a cigar. "I'm ready to begin," he ventured.

"Begin what?"

"Working."

"For whom?" The question was clipped off shortly.

"Why, for you." Tommy looked blank.

"Sure?"

"I—I don't think I understand——"

"You must. Now listen." There was a subtle, restless power in the man at the desk that made Tommy think of a tightly coiled spring. "You're going to work for—Thomas Cass. To do that *successfully* requires that you work for me. Understand?"

"I—I think so."

"Enlightened self-interest, Cass."

"Yes, sir."

"You played football, I think you told me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I never went to college myself. *I've* played business instead of games. But the principle's the

same. The *team* first. Get my thought?"

"Well, yes—I——"

Mr. Burroughs drummed pensively against his teeth with a pencil. "You took your degree?"

"Yes, sir."

"Think it's worth anything—in money?"

Tommy thought a moment. Then he looked up at the clear, cold gaze fixed upon him appraisingly. It made the words trembling on his tongue seem rather flabby. He decided to be candid.

"Yes, I do," he said doggedly.

"Why?" The challenge was biting.

"Because—well, it means you've gotten through. It isn't much; any fellow can do it, of course. But it's something. And if it doesn't mean you've learned anything, it does mean you've learned how to learn, to a certain extent, that is. And it——"

"Umn!" Mr. Burroughs sighed noncommittally, looking out of the window. "I think you'd better meet Mr. Dickinson. He'll be your immediate boss." He touched one of the many buttons at his elbow.

Tommy was crestfallen. It was obvious that his effort at frankness had failed lamentably. Next time he would know better.

His words had not been clear. Perhaps, if he qualified them—— He glanced up, and found the chill gray eyes fixed on him again. "You've set-

tled on living quarters?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Burroughs was uniformly surprising. He fumbled under a pile of books and brought forth a slip of paper. "Here's a list of boarding places. They're all good, I think. The rates are marked."

"Oh, thank you," stammered Tommy, marveling. "It's awfully——"

"I'd suggest you pick your class and look them over this afternoon."

Just then Mr. Dickinson came in. "In charge of advertising," explained Mr. Burroughs curtly. Tommy, acknowledging the introduction, surveyed the newcomer. He was a pallid young man, spectacled, loose-jointed, and soft of flesh, who shook hands limply. It was impossible not to contrast him with the tense alertness of Mr. Burroughs. One thought also of old Pop Farr's lazy drawl; Mr. Dickinson's wasn't lazy—it was weak.

Tommy sought instinctively to be liked. He smiled tentatively at the advertising manager. But the latter seemed not to have seen him. The rebuff Mr. Burroughs had given him was intensified. It hurt; even angered him a little. The fellows on the campus had been only too ready to return his smiles. Then he thought of that long taxi ride through street after street of teeming buildings. Who was he, anyway? These men of business

were not snubbing him; they were scarcely conscious of his existence.

A gesture from the figure at the desk, and Mr. Dickinson opened the door. Tommy hesitated. But Mr. Burroughs was already immersed in a pile of papers. The inference was obvious.

"Ever done any advertising?" asked Mr. Dickinson as they made their way down a dark hallway.

Tommy's faith in frankness had been shaken, but not destroyed. "No," he said, "I'm just out of college."

"What college?"

"Yale." He was unable to prevent a faint note of pride from creeping into his voice.

Mr. Dickinson apparently was not affected by it. "Here's our quarters," he said listlessly, opening a door marked "Advertising Department." His quick glance took in a drawing table, a row of filing cases, very dusty, and a vague miscellany of papers and tattered magazines. The wall was lined with lithographs, calendars, bright-colored posters. The floor was carpetless. It was all in depressing contrast to the virile elegance of Mr. Burroughs' office, with its bare, gleaming mahogany, and the soft Persian underfoot.

There were introductions immediately. "Mr. Cass; Mr. Lieberstadt, our artist, and Miss Gallery."

Tommy shook hands. The artist, a red-headed youth, with a green eye-shade, torn at one edge, pushed up on his forehead, removed the half-burned cigarette which was hanging from an unshaven lip. "Glad t' meetcha," he observed, returning immediately to his work. The stenographer, a straight-sided female of advanced years, merely smiled amiably, exhibiting two rows of very bad teeth.

Tommy's thoughts were centered on the artist's cigarette. He wondered; then he felt Mr. Dickinson's hand on his elbow, and he was gently propelled toward a door marked "Private" at the end of the room. "A special cage for me and my assistant," was the explanation.

A moment later he heard himself introduced to "Miss Manard." Recollecting the ancient stenographer in the other room, he was not immediately attentive. Then his eyes opened. A girl of about his own age had risen from the big double desk, with hand outstretched.

He was not given to the observation of details — particularly feminine details. But he was acutely conscious of Miss Manard's appearance. She was not at all in key with her rather dingy surroundings. There was as much charm in her appearance as in any girl he had ever seen. The gown of soft blue silk, suggesting rather than revealing her lithe figure, with the low collar of ivory lace, was, he

concluded inwardly, "a peach!"

But she was also different from all the girls he knew. There was an open frankness in her clear brown eyes that made one think of men — fellows like Pete Culver and Burton — and there was a crisp incisiveness to her voice, an alert assurance about her whole manner altogether surprising in a girl.

He couldn't just explain the distinction. Girls clung. The thought of Miss Manard clinging to anybody almost made him laugh. He decided that if she liked a fellow he'd have to be a regular chap and no mistake; if she didn't——

Mr. Dickinson unexpectedly said something that filled Tommy with a strange mixture of gratitude and apprehension. "I'm going out for a moment, Miss Manard," he said in his colorless way. "Will you explain things to Mr. Cass?"

When the door closed behind him, she went back to her desk. "I hope this litter won't set you a bad example," she said cheerfully, making a brisk pretense of tidying up.

Tommy was tongue-tied. He felt extraordinarily foolish.

"Sit down, Mr. Cass. Let's talk about things."

"Thank you." The rich timbre of her voice sounded in his ears like an organ chord. "Thank you," he repeated, and sat down. But unfortunately he was thinking of Miss Manard's complexion and

morning roses newly washed with dew rather than of the precise location of the chair, so that he sat down, very firmly and painfully, on the floor.

The hot blood flamed up to his hair. There was a tense moment as they stared blankly at each other. "Well," he growled savagely at last, "why in thunder don't you laugh?"

She was staring at him, her eyebrows slowly rising. A faint quiver appeared around her lips, and lines deepened in the corners of her eyes. The trembling of her features became uncontrollable. Suddenly she threw herself back in her chair. "Oh, oh!" she cried. "I can't help it. I know I shouldn't, but I can't! I can't!"

Tommy, still sitting on the floor, looked at her ruefully. "Can't what?" he demanded irritably.

"I—I only just saw it!" She covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh, look—your hat!"

He got up stiffly. "If you mean to——" he began.

"Y-you're *sitting* on it!" she choked.

He looked down at the floor behind him. Then he understood. The bright, new expensive straw was none of those things any longer. He surveyed the wreck thoughtfully. "I seem to have spoiled my hat," he said.

"Rather!" She went off into another spasm.

He stared at her dubiously. "I—I suppose I

ought to apologize," he began.

She wiped the tears from her eyes. "No need. Men *always* lose their tempers when women laugh at them."

"I *haven't* lost my temper!"

"Oh, Mr. Cass!" She collapsed in another burst of laughter.

He watched her for a moment. "Say!" he demanded suddenly, a singular grimness coming over his red features. "Maybe you'd like to know what made me do that circus stuff?"

She sobered instantly at the look in his eyes. She studied him thoughtfully. Then his unspoken message came unerringly on the wings of intuition. "No," she said slowly, "I wouldn't."

"You haven't any business to look like that," he grumbled under his breath.

She gave no evidence that she had heard him. The smile so suddenly extinguished in her eyes gave place to a cold gleam. She leaned forward over the desk, and her lips formed a straight line.

"See here, Mr. Cass," she said icily, "I think you're a nice boy, but if you and I are going to be friends you've got to find some other reason for falling over chairs than — than—— You understand, don't you?"

"Yes," said Tommy meekly. "I understand."

"All right, then. Let's get down to brass tacks."

CHAPTER III

IN THAT memorable interview with Mr. Burroughs in New York, Tommy had phrased his aspirations simply. He would start at the bottom, of course. All he asked was assurance that he started on a *ladder.*

Nevertheless, ten minutes of Miss Manard's discourse upon "brass tacks" engendered doubt. A suspicion of inadequacy became a consciousness of original sin. His attention wandered. He did not hear all she said. But he heard enough to be convinced that he knew nothing of real value, and unhappily skeptical that he ever would.

"The office opens at half past eight," she finished. "It closes when the work is done, usually about five-thirty. You will—are you listening to me, Mr. Cass?"

Tommy came back guiltily. "No," he admitted frankly, "I wasn't."

She studied him, biting her lip. "I don't suppose you'd care to tell me what you were thinking about?"

An engaging candor was an instinct with him. Though he flushed and stammered a little, he told

the truth completely: "I — I was invited to a house party before I came out here. I — I was just thinking about it. Things are so — so different!"

"Different?"

"Rather!" He flashed a diffident smile at her before his eyes dropped. There was a boyish charm in his embarrassment, of which fortunately he was quite unconscious. "You see, I never had a girl to talk to me this way before in my life. It sounds awfully conceited to say it, but — but — well, you know, girls always — er — kind of *looked up* to — to — a fellow!"

She surveyed him quizzically for a moment. A suggestion of a twinkle hovered in her eyes. Then, with a sudden movement, she snapped the rubber band from a roll of proofs and cleared an open space among the litter of papers on her desk. "You might begin on that electro cabinet, Mr. Cass," she said evenly. "You'll find the plates numbered to correspond with the drawers."

Her gesture made Tommy feel that he had been swept to the coldest outer fringe of the solar system. "I hope you understand what I meant," he began earnestly. "I——"

Her reply was distant and definitely impersonal: "If any questions arise, Mr. Cass, don't hesitate to come to me."

"Yes — ma'am." Tommy had an extraordinary

sense of minuteness as he backed awkwardly out of the private office.

He set diligently about the task of reestablishing order in the electro cabinet. But it was impossible to keep his thoughts from straying into unrelated bypaths. He suffered a kind of detachment, as if one part of personality stood to one side mocking the other. Memory, vociferous imp, perched on his shoulder, jeering. "Ho! ho!" it laughed. "It seems to me I recall the day when forty thousand people rose as one to cheer the mighty boot of Cass. And hordes of little boys followed him on the streets. And newspapers printed his picture. And girls——"

"Aw, shut up!" growled Tommy savagely. "Ancient history! Stone-age stuff!"

It seemed only a moment, though it was nearly an hour, before he heard Miss Manard's cool, inquiring voice: "Have you finished, Mr. Cass?"

"Ho! ho!" screamed the Imp deliriously. "My eye, how she treats the great Cass! Everybody in the office is laughing at you, Tommy."

Tommy let fly instinctively at the pest on his shoulder, and succeeded only in imprinting a great smudge of soot on his crimson cheek. "Let 'em laugh," he gritted through his teeth. "It's their turn now!" To Miss Manard he merely said quietly: "Not yet."

Despite the difficulty in concentration, due to the incessant ridicule of the Imp at his ear, he persevered doggedly, and shortly before noon the task was completed.

He went in at once to report to Miss Manard. "It's all done," he said briskly.

She went out to look. He watched her as she went rapidly through the drawers. Presently she glanced up at him, a curious expression in her clear eyes. "Tomorrow, Mr. Cass," she said in an undertone, but distinctly, "you can do it over. You've mixed electros and originals. Electros have a copper shell on a lead base — see, like this." Her long fingers held up one of the engravings for his inspection. Lithe, graceful fingers —— "Do try and remember that next time."

Before he could speak, she had gone back to her room. "Ho! ho!" roared the Imp. "Flunked on the first trial! Oh, Tommy, if you could only see your face!"

The noon whistle sounded gratefully after a morning under Miss Manard. Tommy lost no time in putting on his coat and slipping out to the wash room. And he did not dally in cleaning up. He could not bear to face any one just then.

His departure from the building was almost a flight. Gusts of black rage alternated with fierce resolves to cast himself into the lake. A fine start,

indeed! Recollection of his bright confidence of success made him writhe with shame. The green scarf — ugh!

He had but one thought — to put as many miles as possible between him and the scene of his humiliation. Thus inspired, he took the first car which presented itself, and threw himself back in a seat to glower at life and curse Mr. Burroughs and Miss Manard and himself impartially to shriveled cinders. Then presently he awoke to a realization that he was an hour's ride from his destination and rapidly making it longer.

"No use being a big fool just because you're a small one," said the Imp sensibly. Rather shamefaced, he took out the list of boarding houses Mr. Burroughs had given him. The aid of the conductor was enlisted, and, in consequence, by five o'clock, he was officially the occupant of a small, dark, but reasonably clean room on West Fullerton Avenue, having paid a week's rent in advance and sent for his trunk and bag.

This matter of abode settled, he recalled that under the stress of wrath and humiliation he had forgotten his luncheon. So, at the unseemly hour of half past five, he sat down before the white-enameled counter of a very inexpensive restaurant and consumed a pot of nourishing, filling, and, on the whole, savory baked beans. It occurred to him that

his breakfast had cost exactly five times as much as his dinner, and that made him realize what a lifetime of experience had intervened between the two meals. As he washed down the bitter recollections of the day in a long draught from the massive glass, he decided that he had never been so lonely and generally unhappy in his whole life.

An eloquent wish broke from his lips. By jingo, he'd like to make Miss Manard *cry!*

He rose early next morning, and was inside the doors of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company by eight o'clock. The result was that when Miss Manard arrived he was able to greet her with the announcement — triumph not wholly concealed — that the electro cabinet had had its second renovation and was ready for inspection.

She went through the drawers rapidly, as before. Her comment was brief, but satisfying. "Good work!" was all she said.

He rather expected immediate transfer to duties of graver import, but apparently she had nothing for him at the moment. He was idle for an hour, until Mr. Dickinson came in.

He was sure, then, that some occupation would be forthcoming. But, beyond a faint nod of greeting, his existence continued to be ignored. Finally, after listlessly glancing through the magazines scattered about and becoming excessively bored, he resolved

to make his presence felt.

"Isn't there something I can do?" he asked plaintively, when the advertising manager chanced to pass him.

Mr. Dickinson halted, looking vaguely annoyed. "Why — er — yes, I suppose so. You might run through those scrapbooks and see what we've been getting out."

He spoke without enthusiasm, and Tommy followed his suggestion in the same spirit. It was footless work! At first he made a real effort to instill interest in the monotonous pages of proofs, but it was not long before he found himself yawning.

He looked up from one particularly cavernous gape to find Miss Manard's gaze fixed upon him intently.

"I — I beg your pardon," he stammered, rising hastily. "I ——"

Her question was whimsical: "Reading the lives of the saints?"

He sensed a faint derision, and he tried to explain. But she waved him silent. "Come into my office, won't you? Perhaps I can make it mean something."

He followed her, relieved, and yet a little apprehensive.

"Sit there in Mr. Dickinson's place," she said. "He's gone out."

Piling the bulky scrapbooks on the desk, he obeyed. She drew up another chair and sat down beside him — so close that a strand of her hair grazed his cheek. He was conscious of a subtle fragrance, like the freshness in the air after a thunder shower. One thought of flowers. It was very difficult to concentrate. But a glance from her serene eyes helped noticeably. It was almost as specific as a rap on the knuckles.

"Mr. Dickinson asked me to look these over," he explained apologetically.

She nodded. "Yes, of course. But it ought to be done understandingly. They're different kinds of ads, you see. Dealer, consumer, keyed, mail order, general publicity, and so on. Then copy has different purposes. Take this series, for instance. It's meant to sell service rather than paint."

"But I don't see where Champion gets anything out of this sort of thing," protested Tommy, getting interested in spite of himself. "There's nothing but the name of the company in small type at the bottom!"

"Exactly. Looks like the loveliest altruism, doesn't it? Well, it's not. Here's the idea. Build up business in *general* — new business — and some of it's bound to come to us. It's creative advertising, the finest kind."

She went on turning the pages with a lambent

sparkle of comment and elucidation. At one large proof in color, she paused. "Hello!" she cried. "There's a great ad — one of the first I ever did."

Tommy's exclamation was unforced: "It's a peach!" He really thought it was.

She leaned back in her chair and stared at him. "Why?" she demanded bluntly.

He was disconcerted by her severity. "Because — well — because ——"

She interrupted him: "Because it has a pretty picture in it and reads smoothly; that's what you're going to say. Now listen to me, Mr. Cass. It happens to be one of the worst pieces of copy that ever went out of this shop."

"No!" Tommy studied the proof, genuinely amazed.

"Yes. So just put this down as Lesson I. The only thing that matters about an ad is the sales it makes. An ad isn't a work of art; it's a piece of machinery. And it isn't worth a button unless it works."

Tommy had a sudden access of wisdom. "Why — why doesn't that apply to art?" he said slowly, feeling for his words. "Take books, for instance. They're art, aren't they?"

"Some of them."

"Well, take certain kinds of books — funny books. A funny book that isn't funny isn't any

good no matter how good. I mean, I — oh, you know what I mean, don't you?"

She turned and studied him, faint lines of perplexity or astonishment between her eyes. "Why — Mr. Cass, you — you're positively profound!"

He was hurt, and showed it. "You're laughing at me!"

She looked out of the window for a moment without replying, and when she spoke it was dreamily, as if to herself: "Maybe art is just expression, worthless if it doesn't register; nonexistent even. That leads to droll conclusions. Perhaps these motion-study people will get after the painters and the musicians and show them the way to greatness. Efficiency's merely the shortest line between two points. Maybe we'll have finer art when artists learn that. Efficiency in morals is sincerity. Efficiency in —— But good heavens, Mr. Cass! What do you mean by wasting the firm's time on such dangerously interesting ideas? Take yourself off — fly!"

Tommy picked up his books and went back to his desk in the outer office, vaguely troubled with a consciousness of false pretense. He had not intended to be "interesting;" certainly not "dangerous." And as to "ideas," he was quite healthily unaware of their possession.

It was over three weeks before Tommy had an-

other interview with Mr. Burroughs. The summons came late one afternoon, just as he was preparing to leave.

The president of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company was busy telephoning as he entered. Presently the receiver clicked on its hook, but Mr. Burroughs did not speak. Tommy waited a moment. Then he coughed discreetly. Still no sound save the scratch of a pen signing letters.

Mr. Burroughs suddenly leaned back in his chair, and brought the tips of his fingers together. "Do you know why I put you in the advertising department?" he asked abruptly.

"Why—no, sir."

"Think you're fitted for advertising?"

"I—I don't know, sir." Tommy's heart sank. There was certainly nothing very friendly in Mr. Burroughs' manner.

"Umn! Quite right. Neither do I." He leaned forward, shooting the question sharply: "Like business?"

"Yes, sir. Very much."

"Think you're fitted for it?"

"Why—yes, sir. I think so."

"So do I. That's why I put you in the advertising department. Advertising is another name for sales—and sales is the law and the prophets of business."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Burroughs' strong teeth clicked on the end of a cigar. "Going to make a change, Cass."

"Yes, sir." Tommy scarcely breathed.

"Dickinson leaves us this week. Miss Manard takes his place."

"Miss Manard?"

"Yes. Surprise you?"

"Why, no; of course not. But——"

"A remarkable woman, Cass. It isn't often that selling sense and artistic judgment are so well combined. She's done a lot for this business."

"She's been mighty nice to me!" exclaimed Tommy heartily.

Mr. Burroughs failed to take that lead. "Miss Manard," he went on phlegmatically, "has suggested you as her assistant. What do you think of it?"

"Why — I — it's awfully kind of her."

"Umn! Kind — yes. But not wise. You're not competent."

Tommy fancied that Mr. Burroughs' lip curled. A chill settled on his soul. Not competent. How it would hurt his father to hear that! And the green scarf! A sorry ending to his pilgrimage — not competent! Then he realized that Mr. Burroughs was still speaking.

"You can't *sell* without knowing your product,

Cass. A few weeks in the factory wouldn't hurt you."

"No, sir."

"What's chemistry to you — just a name?"

"I — I took a course ——"

"It may not hinder you. Kindly report in the morning to Mr. Frembach. Live chemistry for a while."

The abrupt creak of Mr. Burroughs' chair and the rustle of papers indicated that the interview was ended. Tommy stole out of the office quietly.

He was uncertain of his feelings. There was elation that his fears had been unfounded. But he was also conscious of a distinct depression. He tried to tell himself that he hated to leave the art and science of advertising — quite abstractly — oh, quite! How he would miss the leaden loveliness of electros, the pungent, intoxicating odor of new-pulled proofs, the luxuriant beauty of process work! But the Imp, forever at his ear, would not be silent. "Ho!" he jeered. "There won't be any fragrance of heliotrope in the laboratory, my boy, and that shovel-jawed Frembach hasn't eyes like flakes of topaz. You're a most awful idiot, Tommy Cass! Why don't you admit it?"

He met her in the hallway, just as she was going out.

"I — I just heard," he gulped. "It's great. I —

I want to congratulate you!"

The touch of her cool hand in his thrilled him astonishingly. "Thank you, Mr. Cass," she said simply, without a trace of the confusion which had overcome him. "I'm only sorry that Mr. Burroughs didn't give me all I wanted. I — I shall miss you."

Tommy lay awake that night, thinking about it. "She said she'd miss me," he repeated at intervals, quite foolishly, but with strange contentment.

The Imp was not at all impressed. "Of course she did, you ninny! What else *could* she have said?"

"No," insisted Tommy drowsily. "She *meant* it. I know she did."

CHAPTER IV

BEFORE reporting to Mr. Frembach next morning, Tommy went to his desk in the advertising department to gather up the variety of small belongings which had accumulated there. It was a dismal ceremony. Associations clung to every pen and rubber band. The sense of farewell was poignant.

He was about half through the unhappy task when he became conscious of some one standing behind him. He swung round quickly—to face the level gaze of Mr. Burroughs.

"Oh—good morning!" he stammered, a little flustered before the cool stare.

"Morning," answered Mr. Burroughs quietly. "Smoke?" He tossed a cigar on the desk. "Cleaning up, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's a good plan to leave things every night as if you weren't coming back again." An enigmatic smile softened the severity of the older man's features. Without further word, he passed on into Miss Manard's office.

Tommy surveyed the chaos before him in abase-

ment. He thought hard. Mr. Burroughs' brief comment made him realize, for the first time in his life, it seemed, what a tremendous fundamental order was. He had thought, hitherto, of order and seemliness and arrangement as individual affairs; like the neatness of one's person. There had always been some one to pick up after him. The theory of personal responsibility suddenly overpowered him. The succinct phrases of Mr. Burroughs had a way of doing that. A single word was like a spark to a fuse; there was an instant of reflection — and then a bright flare of understanding over all manner of unrelated things. This idea of leaving one's desk at night so another fellow could use it in the morning — what was it but the Golden Rule made commonplace — and useful? More, it was the soft keynote to all *organization.* It was the seed from which civilization sprang.

Tommy was conscious of sudden growth; as if old fetters had snapped. Mr. Burroughs was a wonder! What a leader ——

He attacked the situation with new zest; in ten minutes he was ready to move. The wastebasket was the gainer by his new understanding. Things which had seemed indispensable were revealed as mere cluttering obstacles to order. They went into the discard along with hampering regrets. He no longer felt that he was leaving the advertising de-

partment; he was merely enlarging the sphere of his experience. He went upstairs to the laboratory quite happily.

Mr. Frembach was intently stirring a vivid green liquid in a beaker when Tommy entered, and beyond a muttered invitation to "sit down," said nothing. His appearance was at once commonplace and arresting. Age, not less than forty—probably more. Thick, graying hair, sorely in need of the shears, standing out from his head like the soft bristles of a duster. Eyes, large and faded blue. An altogether disproportionate nose. A mustache entirely obstructive. Beside the ample mouth a puckered scar suggested a chronic sneer. The general effect was hardly pleasing.

As if in emphasis, the chemist looked up, frowning. "You're Cass, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Tommy, rather dismayed by the ungraciousness of the reception. "Yes, *sir*."

"What are you going to do here?"

"Learn the first step in paint making, I guess."

Mr. Frembach's long, nervous fingers described an endless diagram in the air. "Humph! I suppose I've got to do something with you. Know an atom from an atomizer?"

"I—I studied chemistry in college—a little."

"That'll be helpful." The sarcasm of the comment was obvious. Mr. Frembach pulled a black-

ened corncob from his pocket and filled it. "Well, what do you want to do?" He spoke wearily.

Tommy looked blank. "I — I thought you'd tell me that."

The chemist stared at him, his brows contracted. Then he chuckled dryly. "All right. The crockery has to be washed. You might wash it."

He went over to a cupboard and outfitted Tommy in apron and rubber gloves. "And don't break any more than you have to," he growled.

Mr. Frembach, on closer acquaintance, remained taciturn, not to say morose, with a sharpness of tongue, when he did speak, that sometimes hurt. But at heart, Tommy soon found, was a certain rough kindliness manifested in the most unexpected ways.

"Come here!" he snapped one afternoon in a manner which usually forecasted a reprimand. "I've got some theater tickets. You can have 'em."

A thought crossed Tommy's brain. Since the exhaustion of the stake given him by his father, he had adhered strictly to his original resolve to live exclusively on his earnings. During the succeeding months consequently his pleasures had been confined to such things as ball games in the parks of a Sunday or a rarely extravagant movie. There were friends of other days in the city, to be sure, only too ready to do him honor. But it was his stub-

born preference to live his life on the assumption that it was bounded, measured, and described by ten dollars a week.

This self-enforced abnegation had not been wholly pleasant. There had been moments of weakness. One smote him now. It was Friday, and pay day on the morrow. He jingled the putative coins in his empty pockets. One could economize——

"Where are they?" he asked, toying with frailty.

"In my pocket."

"I mean — parquet, balcony, or what?"

"You're a particular somebody, aren't you? Seventh row — downstairs."

"Four dollars — umn!" Tommy pondered for a moment. A new and daring scheme had risen to make temptation stronger. "I'll take 'em," he said suddenly. "Pay you tomorrow."

Mr. Frembach swung around. "Pay — nothing!" he growled. "D'you have to have your presents wrapped up in pink ribbon to recognize 'em?"

"I beg your pardon," murmured Tommy. "I only thought——"

"Of course. Everything in the world's got a dollar value nowadays. You can settle it in your will." Mr. Frembach shuffled away, muttering under his breath. Tommy fingered the pasteboards he had flung down.

"Really, I——" he began uncertainly.

"Oh, get out!" snarled the chemist irritably. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

During the weeks he had spent imbibing chemistry under the harsh tutelage of Mr. Frembach, Tommy had found it necessary to make occasional descents upon the advertising department. Usually they had been visits of frank sociability, explained elaborately, in his own mind, by the singular affection he cherished for Miss Gallery and Mr. Lieberstadt. Now, however, his mission was definite, and neither the artist nor the stenographer played any part in it.

He found Miss Manard gazing pensively out of the window. When she glanced up at his entrance, he fancied he saw shadows of weariness under her eyes.

"Hard day?" he asked sympathetically. There was a mountainous heap of papers on her desk.

An unconscious sigh escaped her. "Rather! I *loathe* catalogue work. Paste — paste — paste. *Ugh!*"

"Time to quit, isn't it?"

She sighed again. "I was thinking I'd stay down tonight."

He shook his head vigorously. "I've got a better plan. How'd you like to ——" The presumption of the idea suddenly halted him, appalled. "Maybe you'd think I was — oh, well — what I was

going to say's this: Will you go to the theater with me tonight?" He blurted out the proposal, blushing furiously.

She looked up at him, genuinely surprised. "Who — *me?*"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Nothing. Only I——"

A fear chilled him. "I've only got two seats," he said hesitantly. "Of course, if you want a chaperon, I could get——"

"A chaperon?" She laughed unaffectedly. "Hardly that. But truly — I ought to stay down here." She pursed her lips irresolutely.

"Oh, come on!" he urged with boyish enthusiasm. "That stuff can wait."

"It's behind schedule already. Really, I——"

The situation was eloquent of the difference in their positions. It made him lose confidence again. Nothing of importance would suffer if *he* let things slide. But she — gosh! He *had* nerve! "I — I wish you would," he muttered weakly. "I — I'd be awfully grateful." He felt like a schoolboy. He could have kicked himself for his awkwardness.

She was not, however, without intuition. She was shrewdly aware of much more than he was himself. His youthful gaucherie became, under the subtle alchemy of her imagination, a singularly affecting charm. He did not guess it, of course; per-

haps fortunately. No one had ever told him of the mother that lurks in the youngest of women.

"I haven't been to the theater in ages!" she cried suddenly. "In you go!" With a quick gesture she swept the accusing pile of papers into an open drawer, and closed it with a bang.

It is, as the proverb says, but the first step which counts. Having taken it, Tommy went the rest of the route to destruction with a jauntiness that was magnificent. "We'll have dinner downtown, eh?" he tossed off carelessly. The carelessness, according to the testimony of his pulse, was largely assumed, and the flush on his cheeks was not normal.

If Miss Manard had yielded to impulse and instinct, she might have told him things which it were better for him not to hear. But being a person of natural as well as acquired discretion, she chose to hesitate a moment, as if debating conflicting imperatives. "Why, yes," she said presently, the pause having had its effect, "I think that would be very nice."

"I — I don't know Chicago very well," he faltered, when they were on the street. "Where'd you like to go? Blackstone?"

She laughed. "Let's save something to live on next week."

"Well — where else?"

"There's the ——" She stopped and surveyed

him in that open-eyed, frank way of hers. "I don't know you very well, Mr. Cass," she said. "Do you like music and cabarets and that sort of thing?"

Ordinarily Tommy cherished no particular dislike for such diversion. But this occasion demanded another kind of frame. "No," he declared fervently. "I hate it!"

"Well, there's a dear little place on Federal Street, behind the Union League Club. Shall we try it?"

"Lead on," cried Tommy gayly. "If it's quiet, I'm for it."

He was disposed to approve of anything appealing to her. But he found in St. Hubert's, the little restaurant tucked in between blind-eyed warehouses, a satisfying charm of its own. The silver, gleaming richly against the dull crimson of the carpet; the shaded candles; the deft perfection of the scarlet-coated waiters that made one think of yew trees and clipped hedges and the roast on the sideboard; the low-toned conversation of the other patrons, reflecting the environment, whatever the boisterousness of their inclinations; the subdued dignity of the stone walls and the rough-hewn oaken beams — both, though he guessed it not, simulacra — with the long rows of churchwarden pipes hanging from them; and finally the chop, grilled by an unsung master belowstairs — the whole an exquisite

harmony in the gentle art of dining well.

"By George!" exclaimed Tommy, leaning back after a long draft from his tankard of musty ale. "Who'd think to find this in the dirty, noisy, vulgar mess of Chicago!"

"It's the home of surprises — Chicago is," said Miss Manard thoughtfully.

Tommy leaned forward. Presently she raised her eyes. He watched the reflections of the lights gleaming in their liquid depths. "Won't you tell me about yourself?" he asked softly. "Have you always lived here?"

She smiled at his earnestness. "No, indeed. I was raised down State. When my father died and I had to shift for myself I came up here. I did stenography first — studying decoration at the Institute on the side. Then I was Mr. Burroughs' secretary for a while — until he put me in the advertising department."

"And now you're the whole works!" Tommy was unaffectedly respectful.

"Oh, hardly that!" she laughed. "Mr. Burroughs is very much behind the throne. I merely write copy and run the service end of it; he keeps close watch on policy and all that."

"He's a wonder, isn't he?"

"You think so?" Miss Manard's eyes narrowed.

"Don't you?"

"He's an extremely able man," she said slowly. "I—I owe a great deal to him." Something like a sigh escaped her. Tommy felt something unphrased behind her words. He wondered what it was. But the faint shadow which had settled momentarily over the clearness of her gaze vanished as suddenly as it had come.

"Turn about's fair," she said quickly. "Suppose you tell me about yourself. Did you come into the paint business just because it was a job? Or was there something more? Perhaps you studied with a special purpose in college?"

"I studied the easiest things," replied Tommy, a little sheepish.

"For instance?"

"Chinese history, international law, early English poetry, astronomy, Italian art, forestry——"

He expected her to laugh at this catalogue of futilities. But the shake of her head was oddly wistful. "I envy you," she said.

He was astonished. "Good Lord! Why? What good will that stuff ever do me?"

"None—practically. But it gives you a *background.*"

"But look at you!" he protested. "It'll be years before I get as far as you have—if I ever do."

She studied him soberly for a moment. "What do you think of Mr. Frembach?"

Tommy laughed — a little ruefully. "Crusty as last week's toast, but a marvel in his line."

"And Mr. Burroughs?"

"I told you."

"You envy them?"

"Why, yes — I think so."

"You needn't, Mr. Cass. You can go farther than either of those men." She paused, fingering the contents of the match safe. "They're both specialists. The world's full of specialists. What it's going to need pretty soon are men to use and direct the specialists. Mr. Frembach puts molecules together and makes them work. Mr. Burroughs is a master at hitching up production to distribution and making dividends. But they're not enough. What's needed, Mr. Cass, are specialists in organization, men who can hitch up human beings to one another and make them work — toward the happiness of society. I wonder if you know what I mean?"

Tommy's frankness was a corporate part of him. "No," he said thoughtfully. "I'm quite sure I don't. Maybe I will — some day. I'm going to try."

"That's all one could ask."

He raised his eyes to hers. "You know, Miss Manard," he said abruptly, "it — it comes over me with a rush. The difference between you — and the others. They know all about what things *do*.

But you — you've thought out *why*. I wish you knew old Pop Farr, a chap I used to room with. He's like that, too."

"You're also going to think about the why of things, I know."

"I'm going to try," he declared manfully. Then some mental safety valve released under pressure of unwonted cerebration, and his imagination focussed on what his eyes could see. "If you'll help me," he added gently.

Her glance met his with a cool, humorous appraisal that abashed him. "Hadn't we better be starting for the theater?" she asked calmly.

He glanced at his watch, reddening. "By George, it's eight-fifteen now. I'll get a taxi."

She extended a restraining hand. "Don't be silly. And what is the check, please?"

He stared at her blankly. "What check?"

"The dinner. Let's see. I had a chop and coffee, and——" She opened her bag and slipped a bill toward him. "That covers mine, I think."

He leaned back in his chair, his jaw hanging. "I thought *I* was giving this party," he whispered huskily. "Come, you can't do this, you know. Really, I——"

She was already rising. "Don't you want to be friends with me?" she asked quizzically.

"Why, of course I do. But——"

"Then you must treat me like one."

"But I invited you——"

"Listen, Mr. Cass!" She put her hand on his shoulder in what he felt was a distinctly matronly way. "Money's relative. Between millionaires it's negligible. But the poor don't pay each other's car fare. My dear boy — forgive me — but I know your salary."

He protested vehemently. "But I — really, I——"

"Pure convention, Mr. Cass. And just another evidence of man's sublime egotism."

"If I had plenty of money, you wouldn't object?"

"Probably not. Perhaps at heart, but——"

"Well, I——" He halted, biting his lip. Obviously Miss Manard believed his income to be restricted to what he received from the Champion Paint and Varnish Company. Should he tell her the truth? Rather from instinct than reason, he decided not. Women were certainly odd fish, he told himself with an inward chuckle. Here was one member of the species refusing to let him pay for her dinner on grounds of "economic independence." And back in Cleveland was another — his mother — who would take to her bed in horror and chagrin did she know that her son had permitted his lady guest to foot her own score.

One might calculate the number of years between the two — but it would require a comptometer!

After the theater, on their walk through the silent streets, Miss Manard opened Tommy's spiritual eyes to a number of things which had before been but dimly comprehended, if realized at all. But he was young, and it was midsummer, and by the time they had reached the fragrant stillness of the park his normal, instinctive masculinity had reasserted itself. Abstractions grew more shadowy. His intellectual attention wandered. It was not long before he failed to hear what Miss Manard was saying in a more exclusive awareness of the musical quality of her voice.

"Gee, what a moon!" was his entirely irrelevant response to one of her statements concerning the right to vote. Her perceptions were not dull, and she changed key at once.

"It's lovely, isn't it?" One more acute than himself might have detected a certain absence of enthusiasm in her tone.

"Let's go by the outer drive," he suggested. "It's not much longer."

With the intoxication of the night upon him, he was conscious of no lack of warmth in her assent. For a time they walked in silence, barring his occasionally tremulous admiration for the chiaro-

oscuro upon the quiet waters of the lake. Ordinarily he would have been above such banality, but the silver glow from the heavens put a spell on words, even as it made magic from the commonplaces of street lamp and bench and stone walls. There was a mystery about the world, a bright, enchanting newness.

"Let's sit down," he said abruptly as they passed a bench.

She hesitated, her eyes veiled with a troubled bewilderment. "Isn't it rather late?"

"Just a minute," he urged.

She sat down on the edge of the seat, quite straight. "Not a second longer."

"You don't know how wonderful this has been," he began raptly, after a silence.

"Yes?" There was a faint note of interrogation in her voice.

"I — I've never known a girl like you. You — you're wonderful!"

She made a sound in her throat — not intelligible. He took it for encouragement. After all, she was not so *very* different from the other girls. Not so very. His hand stole out and found hers. "You're a wonder!" he repeated huskily.

For a moment he was timorous. Then confidence returned. She had not withdrawn her hand. It rested in his — supine — but there.

"I——" he began, and paused. She had turned, facing him. There was something in her eyes which enforced silence.

"You've been popular with girls, haven't you?" she said softly. "You understand them."

He essayed ironic denial, but the clarity of her gaze forbade. He hung his head, oddly embarrassed.

"I thought so. But haven't they all been the same kind?"

He became suddenly aware that her hand was still in his. He removed his own with a jerk, grateful that the darkness hid the agony of his blushes.

She sensed his chagrin, and she put her fingers lightly on his sleeve. "Don't misunderstand, dear boy. I'm not angry at *you.*"

"You—you're disappointed," he quavered.

"Not with you. Rather with myself. One wears a mask so long it seems real—a part of one—and then suddenly one's forced to realize it's only a mask. Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't." As always, he was bluntly honest.

"One makes one's way in the world, taking conditions and asking no quarter, and then, when it's least expected, up pops *sex.* I hate it! I hate it! Oh, Tommy Cass—why couldn't you let me be a *person?* Why did you have to remind me that I'm

just a woman?" She covered her face with her hands.

"I'm awfully sorry," he murmured humbly. His bewilderment was abysmal.

"No, you're not. You're sorry because you hurt me. But you don't understand why. You *can't.*"

"Women are certainly queer," he muttered.

She flared at that. "Oh, yes—always that. But if the shoe was on the other foot? Suppose *you* were trying to amount to something in the world. Suppose you were walking along with me, talking grandly about things that mattered to you, and all of a sudden I discovered the moon. What would you do—man?"

"There's a difference," muttered Tommy doggedly.

"That's what hurts so," she cried. "Men have made the world to suit themselves." Her voice suddenly became bitter. "You can't even see the ridiculousness of it. You, a mere child in experience beside me, can patronize me just because you wear trousers!"

"I'm *not* patronizing you," declared Tommy, aggrieved. "It's absurd to say so."

"But you are. You just don't like the sound of the word. It's a fact, nevertheless. I'll be worth five of you tomorrow morning. But tonight you can hold my hand and feel superior and *protective*

—just because you're a man. You know it's true."

"I don't," he protested weakly.

She sighed. "The world smokes a pipe and shaves. Perhaps I'm a fool not to yield to its arrangements. Why shouldn't I set my wits to enchant some simple-minded lord of creation—when that's what he wants, anyway? Why shouldn't I? Why not let some superior creature stroke my hand for the rest of my life instead of slaving my heart out to be something you glorious creatures will never let me be if you can prevent it?"

Tommy had regained something of his composure. He grinned. "You're too good looking," he murmured.

She seized upon the phrase. "That's exactly it. If I didn't care what I looked like, you'd let me alone and be hanged to me. But I do care. I do! That's the pity of it. It's the curse of my sex. We *all* care!"

"I don't think I understand women," said Tommy weightily, as if the admission were serious.

Her answer was short: "It's because they're perfectly simple—and you won't admit it."

When they parted on the steps of her boarding house, she held out her hand. "You're a nice boy, Tommy," she said, smiling. "I've enjoyed the evening a lot."

He blurted out his feeling without reserve: "You

make me think I'm six years old — and you sixty!"

On the way to his car, he thought about it. "She's not the kind you can flirt with. And she doesn't *want* anybody to fall in love with her. But she called me 'Tommy.'"

CHAPTER V

TOMMY'S clock failed in its duty next morning, and he was deplorably late in reaching the laboratory. There was not, however, any comment from Frembach. The chemist was engrossed in a newspaper.

"It's the beginning," he rumbled, without looking up.

Tommy peered over his shoulder at the huge, black headlines. "Of what?" he queried.

Frembach flung the newspaper from him, and clenched his fists. "It's come at last! The day! The day!"

"What's come?" Tommy was puzzled. Why should the mere assassination of an Austrian nobleman be so profoundly moving to the chemist?

The explanation came in breathless sentences: "Listen, boy. It'll be an excuse to attack Serbia. Russia's bound to intervene. That'll bring in Germany. If the kaiser mobilizes, the French will remember the lost provinces and Sedan. And then, old Albion will see her chance. Boy, the Great War is here at last!"

Tommy laughed comfortably. "Oh come!

We've had those scares before. Look at Morocco, and——"

"Preliminaries only. Testing out alliances."

"Nonsense! People don't go to war as cold-bloodedly as that. You forget that the ordinary man has more sense than he used to have. This war stuff doesn't give him a thrill any more. Why, they're reasonable beings over there. Look at the power of the socialists. They——"

"Man isn't a reasonable being, never was," declared Mr. Frembach bluntly. "He's a bundle of instincts. Make no mistake. He *likes* to fight. He's going to."

"But he can't! Modern warfare's too expensive. Besides it's silly!"

"Of course. So's alcohol—tobacco—life itself, if you look at it coldly."

"If there's war, who'll start it?"

"Oh, they'll say Germany, because she'll strike first, and her forty years getting ready. But it'll be spontaneous combustion, I think."

"Are you a German?" Tommy put the question with some awe.

"I'm a scientist—citizen of the world." Frembach laughed disagreeably. "Thus we fool ourselves. If they start climbing the Alps, I suppose I'll remember I was born a Swiss."

"Do you really think there's going to be war?"

"Positive!"

"But dukes have been murdered before and nothing come of it."

"Oh, you Americans! You might as well be on another planet for all you know of Europe. Will you ever wake up?"

"Well, I'm not going to worry till it starts."

"You won't have long to wait."

Tommy laughed. "Gee, you are a pessimist! By the way, what shall I do about that oxide? You know, the——"

Frembach shook his head. "I—I can't think about business today. I think I'll go home."

Tommy followed the gaunt figure with wide-open eyes. "Well, of all the bugs!" he murmured. Then a smile formed on his lips. "Heavy case of katzenjammer prob'ly." Whistling quite cheerfully, he slipped on his blouse and went to work.

Then came that feverish week of accusation and denial, of charge and countercharge, of reverberating declarations, of amazement chilling into fear, as the gray thunderbolt, formed suddenly of apathetic farmers and dull assistant bookkeepers and simple-minded professors, hurled itself in a bloody surf on Liége, Aerschot, Namur. And almost before one quite realized the madness that had gripped the world, the German guns were growling at the gates of Paris.

Tommy, like the rest of humanity, was stunned.

One morning he was asked to step down to Mr. Burroughs' office. He found the oak-paneled quarters of the president filled with strangers, oldish men, saturnine, smoking cigars grimly. In a corner he caught a glimpse of Frembach.

He guessed that the other men were directors. He wondered why *he* had been summoned. The explanation came in Mr. Burroughs' cool voice: "Sit down, Cass. We're having a little council of war over a suggestion of Frembach's. Thought you might be interested."

He nodded, wondering the more. He cast a glance at Frembach. The chemist was biting his nails; he seemed ill at ease. The president went on:

"Now then, Mr. Frembach, if you'll restate your proposition for the benefit of the newcomers."

"Y-yes, sir." The chemist rose awkwardly. "It's the war, gentlemen. As you perhaps know, we're dependent on Germany for dyes. She isn't going to make dyes for a long time to come. It — it seems a great chance for us to get into the dye business."

"That's obvious." The man who spoke was rotund and florid, with a sneering mouth. Tommy took an instant dislike to him. "Why get us here to discuss that?"

Frembach's lip quivered. Burroughs came to his assistance. "The problem's rather more compli-

cated than it looks, Mr. Gentles."

"Well, go ahead. Spill it!"

"It's not mere accident that Germany has the world's dye trade. There are several angles to it. It's partly chemical, partly industrial. That is, aside from individual scientific ability, the Germans have a far better organization than we. Furthermore, the manufacturer over there has the resources of the government behind him."

"I see. Well, what d'ye want to do, Frembach?" Mr. Gentles spoke as if he were delivering a challenge.

The chemist looked appealingly at Mr. Burroughs, but the latter's gesture left the field to him. He began haltingly. "It's rather hard to explain——"

"Suppose you give us credit for some brains. Come on—out with it!"

"Well, sir, the fact is this: We can't make dyes because we don't know how. A good many processes are still German secrets."

Mr. Gentles looked pained. "Good grief! I thought a chemist nowadays could analyze anything."

"N-not quite," replied Frembach apologetically. "But we could do much if—if we had time."

"What d'ye mean—time?"

"That's what I'm getting at. You see, I'm so

taken up with routine work that I haven't any opportunity for research. I have some ideas. I suggested to Mr. Burroughs that I be allowed to work them out."

"Yes. Go on."

Emboldened by what he took for encouragement, Frembach spoke more readily: "If I could be freed of my present duties and allowed to devote all my time to working out these ideas, I think——"

"How long would it take?" A gentleman, hitherto silent, put the question.

"That's hard to say," replied Frembach, tugging at his mustache.

Mr. Gentles took up the catechism. "Suppose we do let you go to this. What are the odds of your coming through with something worth while?"

"That's a difficult question to answer. I think—I—er—I should say the chances were—well—quite good."

"But not certain?"

"Oh, no! Not at all."

"In other words, we might make a considerable investment in your time and have nothing to show for it?"

Mr. Frembach fidgeted uncomfortably. "Yes, that *might* be the outcome, of course. But——"

"On the other hand, if you did land something big, something that would make you famous, what'd

stop you from going to some one else with it?"

The query struck Tommy as gratuitously insulting. He hoped Frembach would resent it. But the chemist merely shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing but my word," he said simply.

"No offense, Frembach," growled Mr. Gentles in some compunction. "That's only business, you know. We've got to copper our bets when we can. Well, Burroughs. What do you think of the scheme?"

"I thought it of sufficient importance to justify my calling you here," replied the president quietly. It was apparent that he cherished no vast regard for Mr. Gentles.

"What do the rest of you think about it?"

Tommy found the debate which followed rather bewildering. At first he was disposed to listen closely and respectfully. Presently the disturbing truth dawned upon him that even among these neat gentlemen there was loose thinking, misinformation unrealized, even flippancy, finally a plain boredom. It was clear that they were dominated by Mr. Gentles, that they dodged responsibility in favor of Mr. Burroughs. He caught himself yawning. The president turned to him abruptly:

"Well, Cass, you understand the situation?"

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"What's your opinion?"

A sudden silence settled on the group. Tommy was abashed. "I—I don't know, sir."

"No opinion?"

The tone irritated. It awakened defiance. "No."

"You're candid, at least." The phrase was uttered bluntly. But there was a suggestion of a twinkle in the speaker's eyes. Then, with a curt nod, he indicated dismissal. Tommy left the office more interrogative than he had entered it. It was difficult to guess why he had been asked to take part, even as a listener, in the discussion.

Frembach joined him in the laboratory a few minutes later. He shuffled in wearily, dejection manifest on his face. "You didn't give me much of a boost," he complained apathetically.

Tommy felt placed on the defensive. "I didn't have much of a chance."

"I suppose not. One can't argue with intellects like Gentles'."

"They—they turned you down?"

Frembach nodded. "Of course."

"I'm awfully sorry."

"Are you? Why?"

The question was disconcerting. "Why, I hate to see a man lose his chance."

"They'll lose more than I will," was the grim response, accompanied by a vicious clattering of

glassware. "What blind stupidity!"

Tommy voiced his sympathy: "It's a darned shame!"

Frembach wheeled, and his voice trembled with anger: "No wonder the Germans talk about civilizing the rest of us. They're right. Gentles is a fine type for you! You'd have to civilize him with a club. No imagination, no foresight, no breadth. Just a fat, squealing hog for *profits*. Refuses to stake me for fear somebody else'll get the benefit. Faugh!"

"How did Burroughs feel about it?"

"On the fence—at first. Then he flopped. Thought the war couldn't last very long, anyhow. Even if I did succeed in turning up anything, the Germans would beat us on price. No imagination. No god but dividends."

Tommy felt his captain slurred. "You can't blame him for that, can you?"

"Perhaps not. That's what he's hired for. He's got to keep an eye on his bosses. My Lord, think of having Gentles for a boss! It makes a chap wish he was a German. Those fellows appreciate imagination, they do!"

"It certainly is a shame!" Tommy was thoughtful for a moment. "Strange they wouldn't risk the little you ask."

Frembach brought his fist down on the counter.

"Why, Cass, they're crazy! They don't realize that dyes are going to be simply ungettable in a few months." He became quite passionate about it. "The textile makers are going to weep on our shoulders. They'll give any price asked. The field will bubble with impossible substitutes. But mark my words! The Germans didn't learn how to make dyes overnight — and neither can we! It took them years to gain their knowledge."

"Colors will be hard to get, too, won't they?"

"Sure. Chemicals of all sorts. We're going to find out what Germany means in the modern world all right. You watch."

"Do you really think the war's going to last through the summer?"

"Summer? Merciful heavens, boy, it may last five years!"

"No!"

"They thought your own rebellion was a six weeks' affair. But it wasn't. This thing's been cooking a long time. And it's going to take a long time to cool."

"Gee, you're a pessimist, Frembach."

"I'm a — oh, well, what's the use of gassing about it? Let's get back to work." A black scowl intensified the natural unloveliness of his face, but Tommy, watching him, was filled with sympathy. It was pretty hard not to be able to do what one

was so keen about, particularly when it looked so sensible.

Tommy did very little work that morning, but he thought a great deal. After luncheon he went down to see Mr. Burroughs.

As was like him, he came to the point directly. "I guess it's none of my business," he began, "but I've been talking it over with Mr. Frembach, and I — well, we think it would be a good thing to lay in a big stock of raw color. You've prob'ly thought of it, but in case you hadn't I — I just thought I'd tell you. Color's going to be hard to get."

The president looked up from his desk. "Much obliged for the suggestion," he said gravely. Then a tolerant smile touched the corners of his mouth. "Frembach's a chemist, Cass. By the time we've exhausted our present stock, the war will be over."

"But he thinks it'll last five years, maybe."

"He's a chemist — not an economist. Five years, eh? Why, my boy, it can't last five months. There isn't enough money on the planet to pay the bill. Germany's got everything against her. Money talks, you know."

"But just to be on the safe side ——"

"You don't understand finance, Cass. To load up with color, on the possibility of a tight market, would be to tie up working capital unjustifiably. It would simply eat its head off."

"I guess maybe that's so. But I——"

Mr. Burroughs swung back to his desk. "Thanks again, Cass. Glad to see you're interested."

Tommy was more interested than any one knew. He went slowly back to the laboratory, his smooth young forehead wrinkled in meditation.

He recalled a talk with his father on the subject of speculation. The exact words stood in his memory. "All business is a gamble, but some is more of a gamble than others. The man who wins has to gamble, but he doesn't play the stock market—except for excitement."

There had been more. It all came to the same thing. When wisdom gambled it chose a game it knew.

The thought culminated in a question to Frembach: "Colors aren't likely to go any lower?"

"You won't be able to buy 'em at *any* price, I tell you."

"Suppose a chap bought up all the color he could get at present prices?"

"He'd double his money in six months. Or treble it."

"Humn!" Tommy was thinking of an indulgent aunt, who, on his twenty-first birthday, had passed on to him a portion of her surplus wealth. "Humn! Do you happen to know what Tonawanda Light and Power fours are worth?" he asked suddenly.

"Of course not. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just wondering. I—er—color's likely to go up pretty fast, don't you think?"

"Fast? It's climbing every minute."

Tommy reached for his hat. "If you don't mind, I—er—I've got an engagement downtown this afternoon."

"Go ahead. I won't be lonesome."

Trying hard not to break into a run, Tommy went out. His heart was singing with suppressed excitement. He felt extraordinarily adventurous.

Downtown, he first visited the safety deposit vaults, from his own portion of which he removed a long, fat envelope. Then he progressed upstairs to the bond department, where, striving to seem quite casual, he had a talk with the manager. There was a brisk telephoning hither and yon, and presently he made his way to the third floor, and the receiving teller. The latter's eye brows elevated at what came over the counter to him.

His banking operations completed, Tommy sallied forth on the second phase of his plan. This proved rather more difficult than he had anticipated, due largely to the reluctance of the various persons he visited to believe that he was in earnest. But when at last he returned to his boarding house, hot and covered with dusty perspiration, he bore triumphantly in his pocket sundry documents evidenc-

ing his possession of something over two thousand dollars' worth of coloring matter, employed in the manufacture of paints.

He grinned at his reflection in the mirror. "Who'd 'a' thought you'd come to this!" he murmured.

He found Frembach intent upon the newspaper when he came in next morning. It occurred to him that this unwonted indifference to duty had become rather marked. There was a certain listlessness manifest. He yawned as Tommy came in.

"Up late last night?"

"Not particularly."

"You look tired."

"So? Well, I'm not!" He leaped to his feet with an oath. "I'm *bored,* Cass. Bored to death. The heart's gone out of things. I've got to quit reading about this confounded war. It—it—oh, hang it, it keeps me thinking!"

"It's too bad!"

"Lord—if they could only see what they'll miss! Some one else will get the jump on them sure. I met a chap with Piggott & Kunz yesterday, Joe Wormser. They're going after the dye proposition—hard. The joke of it is, Wormser doesn't know any more about chemistry than you do." He laughed bitterly.

A small action not infrequently precipitates a vast

amount of thought. Tommy's audacious plunge into speculation had awakened all sorts of mental processes. One taste of the flavor of finance intoxicated him. It made the preposterous seem quite logical.

"Why don't you go it on your own hook?" he asked calmly. "Just as I have," he was tempted to add.

Frembach scowled. "Who'd buy my bread and butter?"

"Is that the only difficulty?" Tommy spoke with the easy dignity of affluence.

"Isn't it enough?"

"Money's always to be had." The consciousness of recent achievement lent Tommy a singular confidence, reflected in the, one might almost say, grandiloquence of his manner. "What would it take?" His pencil was out and poised.

Frembach eyed him in almost comic perplexity. "What d'ye mean?"

"First—all necessary equipment furnished."

"While you're dreaming you might as well add the unnecessary, too. It don't cost any more—to dream it."

"All right— necessary *and* unnecessary. Now, then, how little could you live on?"

"A loaf of bread and a jug of wine—almost nothing."

"Well — say thirty a week?"

"Like a king!"

Tommy figured rapidly, a curiously new aspect of maturity on his boyish features. "Say fifteen hundred dollars salary, two thousand dollars equipment, incidentals, five hundred dollars —— Would four thousand dollars carry you for a year?"

Frembach licked the long ends of his mustache. "Say, what are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm being extremely practical," said Tommy earnestly. "Burroughs and the rest won't gamble on this thing, but I've come to the conclusion that they're passing up a good thing. So I think I'll gamble myself."

"Go on. This is — *marvelous!*"

"Throw up your job here, get a laboratory somewhere, and go to it. You'll have nothing on your mind, and nobody to bother you."

Frembach threw back his head and laughed tremulously. "Have you gone absolutely crazy, young fellow?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Who's the good fairy? You?"

"Don't worry about that, old top. The money end of it'll be taken care of all right."

The chemist sobered, and the light of suspicion flickered in his pale-blue eyes. "I may be a little touched myself," he snapped sarcastically, "but I'm

not *that* big a fool."

"Who said you were?"

"Would any but a complete imbecile throw up a perfectly good job for a pipe dream like you're putting up?"

"It's no pipe dream. It's——"

"Oh, come out of it, lad!" Irritation showed in the chemist's tone. "It's all right to make fun of me, if it gives you pleasure. But enough's enough."

"I mean every word of it; I swear I do!"

"Aw—rats!" Frembach was nearing anger.

Tommy reflected. "I'll be honest with you," he said bluntly. "I haven't a cent myself."

"Oh, really?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, he went on: "But I think I can get it."

Frembach smiled, as one humors a madman. "Oh, yes, of course."

Tommy's jaw protruded aggressively. "You think I'm kidding you—but I'm not. I'm putting a straight business proposition up to you. If enough money's banked to carry you for a year—maybe longer—and you're given a contract signed by a responsible party, will you take a crack at it?"

"Will a duck swim?" answered Frembach dryly. Then he gave Tommy a shrewd scrutiny. "If you're making a monkey of me, Cass, I'll—I'll strangle you!"

"Understand, I'm not promising anything. I'm merely stating a possibility."

"You're sure there's a possibility?"

"No, I'm not sure. But I think so."

Frembach took out his old pipe. "If you can put this over, Cass," he said soberly, "you'll never regret it; I swear to God you won't!"

Tommy extended his hand. "I'll put it over — or be disappointed in the best friend I've got."

With which cryptic remark he went to his desk to compose a very remarkable letter.

When Tommy's father received that letter he was so amazed that he had to go out for a walk to compose himself. Then he read it again — and laughed till the tears came. He called in the vice president and the trust officer to share his delight.

"Look at his language!" he gurgled. "Just out of college, too. The — the nerve of him!"

Mr. Gaunt, the trust officer, who was unexceptionably matter-of-fact, smiled incredulously. "Are you going to grant his request?"

"Egad!" roared Mr. Cass. "What else can I do? He's got me on three counts — as a charitable old gentleman fond of aiding the deserving poor, as a patron of the arts and sciences, and — and as his own best friend. And then he winds up with a casual remark that it's a gilt-edged investment. What d'ye make of it, Gaunt?"

The trust officer coughed in deprecation. "Really I—er—that's hardly in my line, you know. I—I really don't know what to say."

"Egad—no more do I. But the boy seems to have no doubts." He chuckled delightedly. "The young rascal! He even throws my own words up at me. He quotes me on speculation. Well, well—I suppose there's no better way to learn to use a knife than to start whittling." He pressed a button on his desk, summoning his secretary. "Miss McKee, a letter to my son——"

Tommy had to read the characteristically epigrammatic response from his father three times before its significance reached him. Then he rushed over to Frembach, waving it wildly in the air.

"He's never gone back on me yet!" he shouted.

The chemist straightened up from the steaming retort. "What's the matter now?" he demanded crossly.

"Everything's lovely!" cried Tommy exultantly. "The thing goes through."

"You mean——"

"Read it."

The old chemist took the document Tommy held out to him and read it slowly. His hand trembled. When he looked up there was something glistening in his eyes. "I—I can't believe it!" he whispered.

"Write your own contract!" cried Tommy.

The reply was characteristic: "Contract be hanged! If a rich man wants to soak you, no contract's going to stop him. I — I'll leave that to you."

"Not a word about this, Frembach — to any one."

The chemist seemed dazed. "To think I've had a millionaire beside me all this time. I — I had no idea!"

"Oh, bunkalorum! Dad's pretty well fixed, I guess, but you needn't tell anybody about it."

Frembach moistened his dry lips. "You don't know what this means to me; you can't possibly." A strange, new fire burned in the dull eyes. The listlessness had vanished. He even broke into a tuneless whistle. "It — it's a *miracle!*"

That afternoon Tommy was told that Mr. Burroughs desired to see him. He went downstairs rather reluctantly, fearful that what he had done had been discovered.

Apparently, however, Mr. Burroughs had no inkling of the truth. He merely said: "Frembach's leaving us." His cold gray eyes roved searchingly over Tommy's features.

Tommy's disarming candor saved him: "Yes. He told me."

"Know why?" The question came abruptly.

"Why — no, sir." It was hard to lie. But one learned many things in business.

"Any idea?"

"I — I think he's going to take a rest."

"He didn't seem very tired last time I saw him." The words were put as a statement, but the interrogation in them was plain.

Tommy merely shrugged his shoulders, and remained silent. He was wise enough to guess that if he allowed himself to be drawn into discussion he was lost.

"Hum! Learned much chemistry?"

"Some."

"That's all I expected. Well, this'll be a good time to change." He was silent for a moment, his fingers tapping rhythmically on the desk. "Report Monday to Mr. Kloepke in the shop."

"Yes, sir." Tommy took it that the interview was ended, and rose. He was thankful that his secret remained undisclosed.

He was almost to the door when Mr. Burroughs' cool voice halted him: "Just a moment, Cass. You have no objection to hard work, I hope — *dirty* work?"

"Why, no, sir — none at all."

"That's good. You'll get a lot of it."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Tommy reported to Mr. Kloepke, the factory superintendent, on Monday morning, he really thought he was ready for "anything." Five minutes' conversation, however, made clear that his readiness was abstract.

The actuality of overalls, of being given a number and shown the time clock, upon which he was to register three times a day, and finally of being placed before a crashing, growling machine to feed greasy little disks of metal into its insatiable throat — these things rather shocked.

The press he was delegated to feed was one of a clamorous battery, each tended by a youth of about his own age. No one, he soon found, paid the slightest attention to him, and the insistent hunger of the machine prevented his paying much attention to any one else.

Novelty made the morning pass quickly. At noon he went across the street to the little restaurant he had been accustomed to patronize hitherto. He looked around for companions of the shop. There were none to be seen. There were stenographers, clerks, office boys, people he knew — but no over-

alls. Next day, he resolved, he would bring his lunch in a tin box. He liked to do things thoroughly.

The afternoon dragged somewhat. Monotony raised its disagreeable head. Unfamiliar muscles began to ache vaguely. When the five-o'clock whistle blew he was completely exhausted. He smiled to think of it. All done up — with work that girls did! And the agony of his flayed fingers!

That night the everlasting pound of the press and the chink of the metal falling into the trays made his sleep restive. He was tired in the morning, and he faced the future gloomily. At the factory, he fell into the line of workers, winding up to the time clock, almost sullenly. He was acutely conscious of the dinner box at his side. No one spoke to him. Even when he had donned his overalls, and again stood before the crunching jaws of his machine, his presence was ignored. The other boys on the row talked to each other; they merely glanced at him indifferently.

The tedious prospect of feeding bits of tin all day long sickened him. The same thing tomorrow and the next day and the day after. A kind of panic gripped him. Would the greasy filth ground into his cracked finger tips poison him? The cords in his neck ached dully. He tried to relax. One can get used to *anything,* he whispered fiercely. His

jaw set. If others stood it, *he* could.

Novelty vanished utterly. But something else took its place. Vanity, perhaps. These other lads beat him two to one. There was his way of doing it—and better ways. Even this job revealed the possibilities of a game. He glanced at the clock. So—pretty awkward! If one tilted the piles of disks a trifle, he got a purchase; it made for speed. He tried it. The clock's message a minute later was encouraging. He was doing better. Then his lips compressed. By George, he'd be the best one there!

He had conceived a dislike for the great press. It was a monster without heart, repeating, with every champ of its jaws, its insistence upon his ignominy. It was his master rather than his servant. Suddenly it occurred to him that it was neither; it was his companion in a not uninteresting sport. He was surprised how quickly the time passed to the noon whistle.

He followed the other workers from his aisle out to the yard, and sat down with them. They were an ill-mannered lot, he decided presently. They spoke to him, and replied briefly to his advances, but there was no cordiality; absolutely none. He made deliberate efforts to win them; they remained unresponsive.

The thing hurt and puzzled him. Never before had strangers repelled him. On the contrary.

Gradually a strange quality of mistrust in their manner penetrated to him. It troubled him immensely.

Day after day he renewed his efforts — almost desperately. But success was small. They called him by name. They were quite civil — even, at times, curiously respectful. But they contrived clearly to make him understand that he was not one of them. And he wanted to be one of them. He had never before been an outsider. It hurt.

Days succeeded days colorlessly, until they had rolled into weeks. He had become an expert at the stamp press. No one had to tell him; he knew it himself, and the clock was corroboration. The strangeness in the overalls and the number and the time clock had gone, and his hands were leathery. But the wall between himself and the others was still unpenetrated. It shut him off, not alone from those near at hand, but from all the rest. Yet the whole plant seemed to know him — or about him. Girls giggled as he passed. Always there was a feeling of furtive glances behind his back. And when, doggedly bent on breaking down this exasperating, unspoken hostility, he approached little groups of workers, conversation immediately became halting, coldly civil.

He recalled a chap in college — ugh! a hopeless bird — who had gone out of his head brooding over

his unpopularity. At the time the thing had been incomprehensible, a little ridiculous. But it was clearer now. For the first time in his life Tommy began really to lose confidence in himself.

Then one afternoon his brooding sense of hurt was split like a taut skin, and understanding entered.

His coat under his arm, for it was rather warm, he was walking, sullen and alone, through the gate, the day's work ended.

Usually there were groups of people standing about, gossiping or waiting for some one. But this afternoon the groups had coalesced in one, quite blocking egress. From its center came hot voices, some good-humored wrangling, bursts of rough laughter.

"What's up?" asked Tommy of a grinning lad who had just emerged from the press.

"Aw, Red Dolan's drunk again," laughed the boy, as if it were small cause for such an uproar.

Curious, Tommy thrust his way into the surging throng. Over the tossing heads he caught glimpses of a carroty shock of hair, hatless, and underneath a moist red face, the lips moving fiercely. That Mr. Dolan was engaged in a bibulous denunciation of some one or something, much to the enjoyment of his auditors, was easily apparent.

A lane opened suddenly among the moving heads,

and Tommy found his eyes looking directly into those of the orator. An instant later he experienced the sensation which comes to one in peculiarly unpleasant nightmares — of having the curtain rise without warning, disclosing one — usually *en deshabillé* — alone on the stage of a vast auditorium.

"There he is — the limb!" cried Mr. Dolan ferociously.

The crowd melted away to either side as if by magic. Panic-stricken, Tommy realized that the blunt forefinger of the speaker was leveled directly at himself. A sudden hush fell on the gathering. His jaw hung limp with stupefaction. Never had he been so painfully bewildered. Then he found his voice.

"What's the matter with me?" he queried almost plaintively.

In lumbering bounds, Mr. Dolan advanced. A huge fist wagged menacingly under his startled nose.

"Ye think you're as smart as th' ould wan himself," roared the fiery-eyed giant. "But I know ye fer what yez are!"

Tommy felt like laughing at the absurdity of the situation. "Maybe you'll pass your information on to me?" he suggested coolly.

Dolan turned to the bystanders. "Listen to the —— He's tryin' to keep up th' bluff."

Tommy grew immensely irritated. "With all

your language you may say something if you aren't careful."

"By the holy! Th' young sneak's trying to kid me!"

Tommy tossed his coat on the ground and stepped forward. "When you say things like that, don't say 'em to me," he rapped out icily.

Dolan's curses were incoherent, but fervid. "I'll not be afther choosin' av me words on any white-livered, pussy-footed *spy!*" he bellowed. "Go back, ye scut, to th' slob as sent ye. Go——"

"Yes. Go on. What else?"

"Go back, I say. Go on, wid yer white face an' yer shiny collar. Go tell Burroughs what I'm sayin' to ye. Go tell th' dirthy little——"

He said no more just then. With a leap like the snap of a spring, Tommy was upon him. His quick blow of defense was stopped in mid-air, with steely fingers gripping his thick red wrist like the jaws of a vise.

There was a sudden wrench, and as if a safe had dropped upon him, the big man was on his knees, squealing incoherently with pain. "Leggo me arm! Yer breakin' th' bone! Ow-w-w!"

Tommy relaxed his hold slightly. "I'll break every bone in your fat hide before I'm through!" was his cheerful assurance. "Now, then, you big stiff, what did you mean by calling me a spy?"

The unhappy wretch, on his knees, muttered unintelligibly. But a sharp pressure of the strong fingers gripping his wrist clarified his speech wonderfully. "I take it back!" he groaned in agony. "I take it all back. Ow — it's killin' me y' are!"

"And you're taking back what you said about Mr. Burroughs, too." A slight twist, by way of emphasis, and the howls of pain from the writhing victim redoubled.

"Ev'ry word. Ow — ow ——"

"You aren't fit to lick his shoes, are you?"

"The saints fergive me — I'm not! Oh — gee, mister! Be careful, for the love o' Heaven. You'll ——"

Tommy's fingers opened, and a sudden thrust of his foot sent Mr. Dolan sprawling profanely in the dust. "When you're sober, if you want any more, come and tell me."

Then he turned and surveyed the astonished onlookers. "You're a fine bunch of cattle!" he said contemptuously. "And it wouldn't take a spy to find it out, either!" He picked up his coat and dusted it. Looking straight ahead, he pushed through the gaping throng, and strode off down the street, his retreating shoulders oddly expressive of the wrath in his soul.

Gradually, however, peace came to him. At least, he now understood the cold reserve, the giggles,

the failure to get under the skins of his fellow workers. And what was more, he began presently to sympathize with it all. A spy was a detestable thing. One might find him useful, but one could not possibly make him admirable. And then astonishment gripped him. He had never dreamed that such things were.

As he pondered, he saw Burroughs in a new light. And also he saw business differently. The splendid machine, with its efficiency, its able captains and lieutenants, its service to humanity and progress, was all a kind of sham. The office upstairs, with its polished mahogany and its trim, competent occupants, was but the gilded vestibule to a Bluebeard's palace. Decaying, poisonous things lurked below, locked out of sight. The whole edifice was built upon hate and treachery and things one didn't like to think about.

It flashed over Tommy that he had gone a great way in understanding. Dolan's abuse had revealed a sordid illiberalism whose existence he had never even suspected. The high lights of commerce, the dignity and competence "upstairs," had fired him with enthusiasm. But these shadows below engulfed him in their gloom.

And then he laughed, catching his breath a little. A fine sort of spy he was — not even aware that spies existed.

Tommy found a new atmosphere when he reached the plant next morning. The indefinable furtiveness was gone. Men eyed him without sulleness, and when he passed the girls they ceased speaking as before, but there was no giggling. Yet he had an uneasy sense that he was being discussed. A strange conviction grew upon him. There was a tension in the air, a spirit of waiting, of fear.

He struggled to grasp what was going on behind that intangible wall. His work suffered in consequence. That did not trouble him. He knew that presently he could not work at all unless this wretched mist of reserve were dissipated.

At noon he sought out an old mechanic, a quiet man known only to him as Jake. In the old man's shrewd eyes he had long felt a kind of mild interrogation, a look which seemed to beckon.

"Jake," he said with characteristic directness, "I can't stand this any longer. Just what did Dolan mean by calling me a spy?"

The reply came slowly, after the thorough mastication of a large pickle: "Lots of 'em thought so."

"Did you?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "I wouldn't care. I've got nothin' to hide."

Tommy was exasperated. "That's not the point. What makes you think of spies at all?"

"We've had 'em before."

"Oh!"

"You can't blame the boys for hatin' it."

Tommy flared. "Hate it? I should say not! I'd hate it myself. Who wouldn't?"

"Well, there ye are."

"But I can't understand. What are spies for, anyway?"

The old mechanic yawned. "Great weather fer October, ain't it?"

Tommy seized him by the shoulder. "Please, Jake," he begged. "I don't want to be held off like this. Won't you tell me what it all means?"

Jake's little eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Well," he said meditatively, "I've thought all along you were a square lad."

"I try to be, Jake, but——"

"Listen, kid. I don't know what Burroughs put you in the shop for, an' I don't much care. Maybe you don't know. But he's put white shirts like you in before. An' some as wasn't white shirts — damn 'em!" He spat vindictively. "They——"

"But what *for?*"

"I'm tellin' ye. The lads here have a leanin' toward organizing. Th' old man upstairs, he wants to head it off. That's all."

"Did you ever *prove* that any of those fellows were — were what you thought they were?"

The old man spoke harshly: "Prove it? No. But any lad as talked much about unions an' that sort o' thing, he always got his time mighty sudden."

"Do they still think I'm that sort?"

Jake studied him narrowly. "They're waitin'," he said softly.

"Waiting? For what?"

The old man hesitated. "I'm trustin' ye, kid."

"Gosh, I hope somebody will!" Tommy spoke from the heart. One could not possibly doubt it.

"They're waitin' to see—what happens to Dolan."

"Oh—I see!" The whistle blew just then. "You can pass the word, Jake, that if Dolan wants another licking he can certainly have it. But—*I settle my troubles myself!*"

The old man rose stiffly, and his eyes met Tommy's. "If you're lyin' to me, son, I—I'll be awful disapp'inted," he said simply.

That afternoon Tommy received a summons to headquarters. He went up, wondering. The president's secretary was in the office when he entered, but at a nod from Mr. Burroughs she went out quietly. Prearrangement seemed evident.

"Sit down, Cass. I just wanted to thank you for your attention to Dolan."

Tommy's eyebrows rose sharply. "You—you

heard about that?" he inquired.

Mr. Burroughs smiled inscrutably. "I hear a good deal."

"He was drunk, sir. He—he wasn't himself." Tommy was as palliative as if he spoke for himself.

"There's an old Latin proverb, Cass—'truth in liquor.' The man was very much himself. He—he's been discharged."

"Oh, no!" Tommy sprang from his chair, the picture of consternation. "Oh, please——"

Mr. Burroughs was frankly surprised. "Why not?"

"Oh—because. You—you don't understand, sir. But really——"

"The man was a trouble maker. We can't have that sort around."

There was a complacent pragmatism in the words which irritated. It called forth a brusque interrogation: "Mr. Burroughs—what did you put me in the factory for?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I want to know."

"Well—for the same reason I put you in the other places. I like you. I see a future ahead for you. You have ability, I think. I wanted you to get a bird's-eye view of the whole business before you specialized."

"You had no other reason?"

"None. Why the question?"

"Because the men in the shop think you had."

"What do they think it was?"

"That you put me there to—to spy on them."

Tommy expected Mr. Burroughs to flare up in wrath at the enormity of the suspicion. But he did nothing of the sort. Instead, he laughed quite easily. "Half their time is spent suspecting somebody of something."

"You had no such idea?"

"Of course not!"

"Then I—I want you to take Dolan back."

"So! Why?"

"Because if you don't I—I'll have to quit myself."

"Just what do you mean?" The smile faded from Mr. Burroughs' eyes, and he leaned forward.

"I mean that if Dolan goes they'll blame me for it. They'll think I'm the worst kind of a liar besides. And I can't work with them if they do, that's all." Tommy's voice trembled, partly with indignation, partly with disappointment.

Mr. Burroughs pursed his lips. "It's a rotten precedent, Cass." He looked up at the ceiling, frowning. "But I see your side of it."

"You——" Tommy halted. It flashed upon him that Mr. Burroughs did not at all see his side of it—that he could not possibly see it. It was a

ghastly flaw to discover in one's idol.

"You might perhaps get out of it this way," proceeded the coldly even voice. "Tell him that you've interceded with me — successfully. Throw a scare into him. It may knock the trouble making out of him for a few months."

Tommy had learned many things, but he had not yet learned the prudence of slow speech. His thoughts still leaped from his tongue unrevised. "Why do you put spies on the men?" he blurted.

The response was curt: "Because I have to."

"But *do* you — really?"

There was a touch of pride in Mr. Burroughs' answer: "There hasn't been a strike in this plant since I've been here."

"And is that the reason?"

"Yes. I know trouble's brewing before they do themselves."

Tommy was unconvinced. "I'd hate it," he said doggedly.

"Naturally. So would I. But I'm not thinking of their feelings."

"Why don't you?"

Mr. Burroughs laughed — quite merrily. "You're an interesting study, Cass. You're learning more rapidly than I ever thought you would."

"It seems to me I'm un-learning," muttered Tommy pensively.

"The same thing. But you mustn't stop."

"Gee, I couldn't if I would!"

"Maybe not. But you could take the wrong track, you know."

"What is the wrong track?"

"Sentimentality."

"I — I don't quite understand."

"Oh, yes, you do. Only you don't realize it. See here, Cass. You think I'm nothing but a cold-blooded profiteer, don't you?"

The query was embarrassing. "Why, I——"

"Oh, yes; don't deny it. You do. But you're wrong. I think about things — a lot. And I've had to put what I think to the acid test. I've been at it a good while, too. And I've made decisions. I know how you feel."

Tommy grinned. "That's more than I do."

"You've had an easy, comfortable life, with things pretty well taken care of by somebody else, haven't you?"

"Yes — rather."

"I thought so. And then, quite suddenly, you're thrown over your ears into the scrambling mess we call business. You got a peep into it through the advertising department. Another with Frembach. And now you're getting introduced to the most important factor of all — the human factor — *labor.*"

"But I'm not seeing it; I'm feeling it."

"Exactly. That's why I stuck you at a stamp press. You're *feeling* it. And unless I'm mistaken, you're feeling it hard."

Tommy offered his hands with a grimace. "Look at 'em!"

"Just so. That's the way most of mankind makes its living. It's a hard way, too — callouses, sweat, lame backs. Not much like the way I make mine, eh? The contrast makes you mad. You think it's a shame. You've begun to pity the poor devils who work with their hands. I wouldn't be surprised if you were already resenting with 'em. Pretty soon you'll be hating with them. Not knowing what to hate, you'll do what you're told, and call it capitalism. Before you know it you'll be a first-rate, journeyman socialist!"

Tommy scratched his head meekly. Mr. Burroughs' analysis of his spiritual progress was uncanny.

"You'll damn the rich man, regardless. You'll talk all sorts of nonsense about the 'rights of labor,' and finally you'll personalize all your wrath in your employer — whoever he is. But, no — I'll save you from that. Before you get to the bomb-throwing stage I'll have you up here with me, and then you'll see the show from the other side of the fence."

"But if ——"

"I know all about it, Tommy," went on Mr. Burroughs, with an earnestness which made Tommy marvel. "I've worked with my hands myself. But I've been boss, too. It comes down to this: Life's a pretty hard thing, whatever your rôle. Even I have troubles. Why, I've lain awake nights with responsibilities that your Dolans don't even dream about. And half the time the trouble-making imbeciles never guess that it's themselves I'm worrying about."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Tommy frankly. "You—you don't *look* like a worrier."

"Come!" Mr. Burroughs sprang to his feet. "Look at these photographs. You met Gentles the other day. Do you think it was easy getting him to agree to this sort of thing—this rest room for the girls, for instance—the piano, those showers down cellar? Don't you suppose he fought like a steer against the profit-sharing scheme I put in last year? My boy, more than half my work in this place has been trying to make the lot of the under dog a little happier."

Tommy marveled, speechless, at the real quiver of emotion in the man's voice. And he had thought him hard!

He bit his lip. "I've been a dummy, I guess. I —I never realized."

"Those I do it for don't realize," went on Mr.

Burroughs a little bitterly. "They babble about their rights — and do their best to kill the golden goose. That's why I have to watch them — to save them for themselves. Why ——" He began to speak almost excitedly, the words tumbling over each other in their eagerness to find expression. "Have you ever seen a cleaner factory — more light — more air? I rebuilt whole buildings because they were dark. And there isn't an exposed gear, an inch of belting in the place. I put in safety appliances before the law even thought about such things. And yet they hate me!" His voice suddenly became quiet again. "It comes down to this, Cass: They're children — helpless, unfortunate, to be pitied perhaps — but born to be children, just as you were born to curly hair and intelligence. They can't run themselves. They don't know how. Somebody's got to do it for them."

"I — I suppose so," mumbled Tommy, enormously relieved at the heart he had discovered in Mr. Burroughs, but at the same time rather confused.

Burroughs sighed. "It's rather a relief to spill it all occasionally. One gets discouraged sometimes, you know."

"I'll bet it's hard!"

The president underwent one of his sudden transformations. He was his austere self once more. "Tell Dolan he can come back, if you like. But —

you understand — it's for your sake, not his."

"Yes, of course." As he rose Tommy suddenly remembered that he was in overalls. He stopped in the hall outside the president's office to glance down at the greasy garment. It troubled him that he did not feel at all like overalls.

Upon his return to the factory, he sought out Jake immediately. The old workman looked up from his bench silently. But there was a message in his eyes not to be mistaken.

"You've heard?" Tommy was struck to the heart. He quailed before the old man's unspoken reproach.

"I'm sorry, young feller. I — I trusted ye."

Tommy's head went back, and he met the other's gaze squarely. "I've lied more than once in my life," he said through his teeth, "but not to you."

The old man shrugged his shoulders, and turned sorrowfully back to his work. The movement cut Tommy to the quick. "Jake," he said softly, "if Dolan wants to, he can be at his bench in the morning. I'm going to ask him now."

He put his working clothes in his locker, and got the address he wanted from the timekeeper. He was intent upon his purpose, but not too deeply to be aware of the contemptuous glances showered upon him from all sides. Apparently the news of Dolan's discharge and the inevitable deductions thereon had penetrated everywhere. He smiled a

little grimly at the injustice of it.

It was nearly dark when he reached his destination. He found the Dolans — father, mother, and children — in poverty-stricken quarters. With a tightness in his throat and a mist in his eyes, he told the red-headed fellow that he could have his job back. The gratitude of the man and his wife was pitiful.

He stumbled away through the dusk, stirred to the depths of his soul. He had always vaguely understood that there were people in the world who walked daily on the margin of things. But to meet them in the flesh! He shuddered.

CHAPTER VII

TO TOMMY it was quite natural that he should go to Miss Manard with his turbulent questions. But to Miss Manard it was extremely surprising. The surprise, however, was temporary. It was immediately succeeded by a subtle gratification. She said so frankly.

"That's ridiculous," he replied. "You must think me an awful ass to be fussing so — about such simple things."

"But they're not simple," she insisted.

"Don't you think they are?"

"Indeed, I don't."

Like all ingenuous people, he sometimes made extremely searching remarks. "They don't seem to bother you much."

She bit her lip. "I — I think you'd better not cross-question me," she smiled wryly.

He was too self-absorbed to notice the opening. "It's funny how one's way of looking at things changes. I've always thought that what one's born to he ought to make the best of. There's lots of people better off than I am. I don't envy 'em much. I certainly don't hate them. I've always taken it

for granted that people worse off than I am feel the same way about me. Now I find they don't."

"What makes you think they don't?"

He told her of the subtle antagonisms he had encountered in the factory. "They're eaten up with a feeling of injustice."

"Queer, isn't it?"

"That's the funniest part of it. At first I thought it was queer. Now I don't, somehow. Doing the same work they do and living with them makes you feel different about it. When I'm in overalls I get an awful dislike for the T. Cass who used to sit up here in a white collar correcting proof."

She smiled quizzically. "You're an odd boy."

He accepted the cue literally. "I guess I am. I feel as if I was getting to be a different person altogether. I never used to think about the fellows who did the dirty work in the world — the work had to be done, and it was done, and that's all there was to it. Now I'm wondering why I wasn't picked for some dirty work."

"You're intelligent."

"Maybe. But *why?* Why does T. Cass have the chance and Bill Jones never get a look-in?"

"You're asking hard questions. Why haven't I red hair?"

He sighed. "It used to be so simple — work hard, be honest, get ahead; that's all there was to it. Now,

darn it, there's something — oh, something — that isn't quite square about getting ahead. I've got the jump on those fellows in the shop. I beat the gun at the get-away. It — it doesn't seem right."

"Why do you trouble yourself?" she asked softly. It crossed her mind that this amiable lad she had hitherto rather patronized was growing rapidly into manhood. In a flash of prescience she saw herself looking up to him, rather than down. She wondered that she had not before observed the resolute angularity of his chin.

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "Blessed if I know. I can't seem to help it. You've been in it longer than I have. It's simple enough to you ——"

"What makes you think that?"

"Isn't it?"

She shook her head. "Far from it. I've taken things for granted, too. I've had to."

"How so?"

"Just like yourself. I've been so busy just working and being honest and — and getting ahead. I've never had time to think much about the *why* of it all."

Tommy slapped his knee, his eyes sparkling. "That's it! The chaps who do the talking are the loafers. The men who are really turning out the stuff are too busy to ——"

Her eyes closed thoughtfully. "Did you ever consider that the people who've made the rules for the rest of the world have usually been — loafers?"

He stared at her, expecting a paradox. But she went on seriously:

"Philosophers seldom work at any other job. Perhaps being a philosopher and studying out how things ought to be is a job in itself. If philosophy depended on the rest of us, the world would never move; we're all too busy getting our own particular selves ahead."

"Now that's funny. I never thought of that."

"I don't know that I ever did myself — until you made me."

"I?" Tommy laughed incredulously.

"Yes. I — I'm objective naturally. Women are. They're not philosophers at all. They take things as they come."

"That's just what I thought I was going to do. I meant to take business as it came. But, darn it, business hasn't waited. It's taken *me*. And turned me upside down!"

"Don't you like it?"

"What? Business?"

"Yes."

Tommy pondered for a moment. "I'm hanged if I know! At first I thought I did. But now — with what I've seen of the *inside* — I — I don't

know. It's got a fine face. But there's something wrong underneath. It—it's like lifting a pretty white stone and finding crawling things——"

She nodded. "I know. But you've been imbibing strange doctrine, Mr. Cass."

Tommy grew heated. "It's not strange! I've merely been in the shop long enough to understand those fellows' point of view. They work mighty hard, I want to tell you. And they're a pretty shrewd lot of men. They're not serfs—not by a long shot. You can't blame them for hating the nickelplated shower baths and libraries and phonographs and what not that Burroughs gives them. I almost hate 'em myself. Good gravy! Wouldn't you hate to be *tipped?*"

"I don't think you're quite fair to him."

"Maybe not. But I can't help feeling that he's on the wrong track just the same. If he thinks he's building on a sound foundation by depending on spies and bribery, he's dead wrong, that's all. Maybe you can keep Russian muzhiks in line with whips and sugar plums, but those fellows downstairs are mighty different stuff. Some day they're going to show it, and then Burroughs is going to learn something."

"It's too bad he doesn't realize the value of your advice." Miss Manard's sarcasm was perfectly apparent.

It brought Tommy up with a rude jerk. His glowing eagerness was suddenly chilled, and he stared at her, his lip pendulous. "Why do you say that?" he demanded.

She tossed her head faintly. "You seem to have gathered sounder ideas in six months than Mr. Burroughs has in sixteen years."

"That's not fair." A dull red showed under his smooth skin.

"It's always fair to criticize — but never to criticize criticism, I suppose."

"That's not fair, either," he repeated, the blood receding from his compressed lips.

"A man who is held in high regard by most people, who produces dividends from a difficult business, and whose factory is widely held as a model, impresses a young man just out of college as ——"

"I'm sorry I spoke about it," he said stiffly.

Her cold irony suddenly left her. "You ought to be," she flared. "I didn't think it was in you to be so — so ungrateful. You've had more done for you than ——"

"I don't want things done for me," he broke in sullenly. "That's just what I'm kicking about."

Her mounting irritation got the better of her. "I wish to goodness you'd had some experience with *ordinary* men. You'd be a little fairer in your estimate of Mr. Burroughs."

He surveyed her, considering. "I seem to be making a great hit with you."

She stamped her foot. "You — you ought to be spanked!"

His eyes blinked in frank wonderment. "I never knew you put Burroughs on such a pedestal," he said slowly.

She opened her lips to speak, but the sudden, illuminating grimness of the lines about his mouth checked her. She fingered a paper weight irresolutely. Then she looked up with an ingenuous smile. "I beg your pardon," she said lightly. "You mustn't ever argue with a woman, you know. We always lose our tempers."

There was no answering smile. Tommy's jaw was set, and he seemed unaware that she had spoken.

She tried again, employing an easy carelessness she did not in the least feel. "You will forgive me, won't you? It was awfully silly of me."

Tommy nodded absently, but the forbidding harshness of his features remained unsoftened. He rose. "You were perfectly justified," he said slowly. A faint tremble was just perceptible in his voice. "I — I didn't understand, that's all."

"Didn't understand what?" The question was gratuitous, and she knew it.

Tommy arose to go, there was no answer, save

the vicious slam of the door behind him.

We are apt to think of the growth of understanding as a gradual process; we are wrong when we do. Understanding comes upon the soul as a sudden, lambent flash. A chance word, a gesture, a fleeting scene is the magic talisman which brings to light all manner of hitherto unrelated and unrealized impressions, fusing them instantaneously into a new, astonishing, but perfectly definite conviction.

Tommy was surprised and enormously puzzled, but quite cognizant, in a curiously detached way, of his own reaction to Miss Manard's defense of Mr. Burroughs. It was like lifting a worn old board in a familiar room and discovering a stairway of white marble, which led to all sorts of delightfully unimagined things. The stairway had been there always, but that made its discovery none the less startling.

There was, of course, nothing out of the way in Miss Manard's support of their common employer. It might, indeed, be dismissed as mere loyalty. Its expression was rather unnecessarily heated and a trifle illogical, perhaps; beyond that there was no ground even for comment. The disconcerting thing was his own response.

He had parted from her that climacteric afternoon in a state of enormous anger. He remained angry for days thereafter. And the worst of it was

he knew perfectly well why he was angry. He could theorize and debate and put endless hypothetical questions to himself, but always his temperamental straightness of thought brought him back to the bald, absurd, altogether disturbing fact —*he was jealous!*

He began to avoid her sedulously. The occasionally inevitable encounters were marked, on his part, by a coldly polite reserve; on hers by a timid provocativeness. She had intuition enough to understand clearly the motives which inspired his seeming indifference. But her femininity drove her to toy with the situation. His almost frantic efforts to preserve his pose afforded her not a little secret satisfaction.

Tommy was equally desirous of avoiding Mr. Burroughs. That, however, was not as readily accomplished. The calls from the president's office were frequent, and it was not always possible to confine the interviews to mere routine affairs.

The situation was impossible. More than once he debated the easy solution of quitting his job. A kind of dogged pride alone prevented. If he was making a fool of himself by the thoughts which gnawed his soul, he would merely double his folly by flight.

Thus always has man conned himself and glazed over the weakness which is his heritage.

Then inexorably the climax came. He had dropped his pocketknife in a pile of scraps, and the task of salvage had kept him considerably after closing time. He was just putting on his civilian clothes, as he called them, and thinking of nothing more important in the immediate future than the Wednesday night prospect of French-fried potatoes when Mr. Kloepke called to him, asking him to take some orders up to the office on his way out.

He mounted the stairs unconcernedly, his blithe whistle echoing in the empty halls. "The boy stood on the burning deck," he hummed, "whence all but he had fled."

It was after six o'clock, and the office was empty. The winter twilight had long since settled, and the furniture was visible only in gleams and heavy shadows. The door to Mr. Burroughs' sanctum was closed, but under the circumstances it did not occur to him to knock.

He was sorry immediately. As the door opened under his hand, he was conscious of a dark mass, silhouetted in the gloom against the faint light from the window. Before he could open his mouth the mass had resolved itself into two parts. Then his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, and he recognized Mr. Burroughs and Miss Manard.

"I — I beg your pardon," he stammered, turning to beat a hasty retreat.

Mr. Burroughs' voice was not quite as level as usual, but it was well controlled: "You wished to see me, Cass?"

Tommy held out the bundle of papers. "J-just some orders, sir."

Again he turned to go, but before he could reach the door there was a swish of skirts, and Miss Manard had preceded him.

On the stairs, he tried to pass her without speaking, but she would not have it so.

"I haven't seen you for ages," she said lightly, falling into step beside him. "What do you do with yourself?"

Tommy wanted to murmur something politely noncommittal and continue flight; instead, he found himself suggesting that he accompany her homeward. It added nothing to his peace of mind that she accepted.

It was crisply cold, and the stars were out. Reason dictated the street car, but walking was decided upon.

"I never thought that of Burroughs," he said presently, when they had gone a little way in silence.

"Thought what?" Color glowed in her cheeks, whether from the nipping wind or something else one could not say.

"That he — he'd take advantage of you like that."

"What makes you think he—he took advantage of me?"

"I—I could break his neck!" he declared in sudden, irrelevant fury.

"Why?" The query was put softly, and she smiled in the concealment of her muff.

He spoke abruptly. "Let's have a hot chocolate or something."

The suggestion was almost peremptory, and she followed him into the drug store obediently. They found a corner stall—and privacy.

Tommy went on as if there had been no interruption: "He had no right!"

"Might I ask why?" Her eyes flashed dangerously.

"Because—because——" He floundered, obviously helpless, his tongue quite inadequate to his emotions.

"Yes—go on."

"He took advantage of you."

"You're repeating yourself."

A sudden, discouraging thought overcame him. "You mean—you—didn't object?" His chagrin was almost comic.

"I didn't say so."

"But you meant it?"

"What do you think?" Miss Manard's femininity was ruling her completely.

"I've quit thinking," muttered Tommy dismally, staring at his cup. "I — I don't know how."

She studied him appraisingly. "You're a funny boy," she said as if to herself.

He snapped back irritably: "Oh, for goodness' sake quit calling me a boy!"

She laughed outright. "You'll always be a boy!"

Finesse was hardly Tommy's forte. "Are you engaged to him?"

The laughter vanished from her eyes. "No."

"Well — are you going to be?"

"What right have you to ask?"

"Because — because —— " A savage growl escaped him. "If he's just playing with you, I'll — I'll break his confounded neck!"

"And if he's not playing — what then?"

He threw himself back in his chair, blinking. "Why, I — I ——" He burst into expostulation. "You can't mean that. Why — he's too *old!*"

"He's thirty-seven."

"See here, Miss Manard." Tommy sought desperately to collate all the scattered threads of a situation which thus far had gotten the better of him. "I'm of age myself. I wish you'd talk without assuming that I was six months old!"

"Well — what do you want me to say?"

"Is Burroughs in love with you?"

"Have you the right to ask that?"

"I certainly have. Is he?"

"He said he was."

"And you — are you in love with him?"

She hesitated long enough to cause Tommy a spasm of acute pain. "That, of course, isn't your business at all," she answered finally, without looking at him.

He leaned across the table, his eyes narrowed obstinately. "But it is my business."

"Why?" The question was put so softly that only the faint movement of her lips was perceptible.

"Because, if you are, I'll give you my blessing and quit bothering you."

"And if I'm not?"

Tommy drew a long breath. "Then I'm going to give you a chance to be in love with me."

That was precisely what any one less obtuse than himself would have known she was expecting him to say. Nevertheless, womanlike, she was tremendously surprised when he did say it. She laughed nervously.

"Why, Mr. Cass — what do you mean?" Immediately the words left her lips he was aware of their one hundred per cent simpering banality. It was exactly what silly, disingenuous maidens always said. She tried again: "I think, Mr. Cass ——"

"It's going to be Tommy and Anne after this," he said cheerfully.

She regained her poise presently. "Am I to gather that you are offering me your heart and hand?" she inquired, deliberately flippant.

The mockery was not at all lost upon him, but his reply was stubborn: "You are."

She surveyed him quizzically, not without a certain wistfulness. "Do you mean that you're in love with me, Tommy?"

He looked at her for a long moment without speaking. It was a look which made her drop her eyes. "Anne," he said gently, with an odd catch in his voice, "this is a public place. I've got to talk as if I was selling a gallon of paint. But under proper conditions——"

She made as if to rise. There was a sudden timidity in her eyes, and she avoided meeting his gaze directly. "I—I think we'd better be going."

His brusque gesture halted her. "Hold on," he said bluntly. "I'm not through. You think I'm crazy. I've got to explain."

"Explain?"

"Yes. You think this is sudden. It isn't. Fact is, I've been liking you better and better from the minute I saw you first. But I thought I was just *liking* you. Even this didn't show me I was kidding myself. Look!"

Deliberately he unscrewed the case of his watch and laid it on the table before her. "I cut this out

of the big picture of the office force that was taken last spring. I — I've been carrying it around for months."

She put her hand over her eyes, and he failed to see the mist which had dimmed them. He went on quietly:

"It wasn't till I butted in on you and Burroughs tonight that I — realized. Anne," he said solemnly, "I — I'm jealous!"

"Isn't that perhaps it — just jealousy?" she queried very gently.

He pondered for a moment. "Maybe," he said frankly. "Maybe it is. But just the thought that you'd say you were crazy about Burroughs made me — sick all over. I don't know. I've never been in love before. I only know I think about you most of the time. I ——"

Her lips twisted in a wry little smile, and her eyes were moist. "Most people go mad like this in the spring. It's like you to pick midwinter."

"It just happened that way," he answered literally.

"I — I think I ought to apologize."

"Good Lord — what for?"

"For letting you — for making you — go mad." She shook her head at his expostulations. "You don't understand, Tommy. Women are queer creatures. They're awfully vain! They like to hear

things — what you've said — even when they shouldn't."

"What you're getting at, of course, is that you don't give a hang about me." He spoke with profound dejection.

"No, Tommy, I don't mean that at all. You're the dearest boy I've ever known. And ——"

"There's a 'but' ——"

"Yes, there's a 'but.' Shall I be quite frank — and practical? You won't mind?"

"I'd like the truth."

"I believe you would. Well, then, Tommy — I like you tremendously. But I don't think I — I care for you — the way you mean. I — I haven't thought of you that way. I've been awfully fond of you — and proud — as if I were your sister."

"Oh, good Lord!" he groaned. "That sister stuff!"

"You wanted me to be candid."

"You are. But go on. How about Burroughs?"

She hesitated for a moment, contemplating her fingers. "If I tell you the truth, you — you won't like it. The truth isn't very pretty in this case, Tommy."

"Go ahead," he commanded. "If you make me hate you, it'll be better for me, I suppose."

"Perhaps you're right." A sigh escaped her. "But it's hard, Tommy. However ——" She

seemed visibly to pull herself together. "You ask about Mr. Burroughs. Well — I respect him more than any man I've ever known. I admire him for what he's done and for what he is. And I think I know more about him than any other living soul. He does a great many generous, beautiful things that no one knows about, Tommy."

"He's a peach!" declared Tommy sincerely.

"He is indeed. But I — I don't care for him the way he cares for me."

"You don't?" Tommy, in sudden exaltation, half rose from his chair.

"Wait. I don't love him — no. But I — I — oh, I hate to tell you this: I've thought of marrying him."

"Oh!" Tommy collapsed heavily.

"I knew you'd hate me when you heard the truth."

"Go on," he muttered through clenched teeth.

A kind of defiance hardened her features. She seemed to plead. "It's not lovely. But I — I've had to fight for what I've gotten out of life. And, oh, Tommy, sometimes I get so tired!"

"You — poor kid!" he choked, and was silent.

"The devils of loneliness get me sometimes. And I'm afraid about the future."

He nodded. "I know."

"No, dear boy, you don't. I'm weaker and more

worthless than you guess. It isn't merely that I sometimes want a home and some one to take care of me. I'm more selfish than that. Other men have offered me homes. But what they offered wasn't any better than the one I could give myself. Mr. Burroughs——" She clenched her teeth, and a red spot showed on either cheek. "I'm showing you my whole soul, Tommy. He—he could give me a great deal I couldn't give myself, ever."

Tommy was momentarily stung to brutality: "Clothes, I suppose?"

She quailed at his tone. "Yes—and a position in the world. I'm a snob, Tommy. I admire him because he's better than other men—abler. As his wife, I'd——"

"How long have you been—er—thinking—about this?"

"Oh, a long time."

"Why haven't you gone through with it?"

She affected lightness, without success. "Conscience partly. I—I just couldn't. And then sometimes my work saved me. When conscience got feeble, a big campaign would come up, or something like that, and I'd be saved again."

Tommy pondered, methodically rearranging his spoon. Presently he looked up. His gray eyes were cold, though a dull fire lurked in their depths. "Your plan was to sell yourself to Burroughs for

what he could pay?"

She recoiled at the harshness of the question. "Yes," she said defiantly. "You see what I am!"

He ignored the lead. "Suppose," he asked thoughtfully, "some one else bid higher — me, for instance?"

"You?" She searched his face for signs of levity.

He nodded grimly.

She could not resist a smile. "It'll be many years before you reach his income, Tommy."

"Suppose I reached it — sooner?"

A man would explain the sudden transformation she underwent by a shrug of the shoulders and a reference to her sex. But under similar circumstances a man would act precisely as she did. It is human nature to begin discussions with a proposal of utter frankness. And then, when the proposal is acted upon literally, we lose our tempers.

It was one thing, she found, for her to analyze herself candidly and without reserve, but it was altogether another thing for him to accept that analysis without protest or demur. His coldly brutal question stung her to a hot and quite illogical response.

"You needn't be entirely silly," she snapped. "It'll be some time before you make as much as I do myself."

He was hurt and surprised by her change of front, but he persisted stubbornly: "Suppose I make it quicker than you think?"

"You've got to make more than money," she answered harshly.

"And that is?"

"Yourself. You're a soft, untried boy. You've got to prove yourself a man."

When Tommy took a line of thought it was difficult to dislodge him. He was pertinacious by instinct and conviction. "All right. When I grow up—will you listen to me?"

She threw up her hands in helpless exasperation. "You're impossible!" she exclaimed.

"I'm in love with you," he replied imperturbably.

"Very well—prove it."

"I'm going to."

She rose, drawing on her gloves. Her lips were tightly compressed, and Tommy thought her angry. Had he been more experienced in observation, he would have known that she was perilously close to tears.

Even as it was, an impulse seized him—more wise than reasoned. But the appearance of the drug clerk spoiled it.

On the street corner, as they waited for her car, he seized her hand.

"Give me time," he whispered earnestly in her

ear. "Lay off on that Burroughs stuff for a while, and——"

Then the car came, with a rumble and screech, drowning out her answer. Afterward he was not sure that she had made any.

CHAPTER VIII

DURING the winter, Tommy paid frequent visits to Frembach. The old chemist had fitted up a rude but adequate laboratory in the cellar of his home, and whatever the hour was almost certain to be found laboring among his steaming retorts and test tubes, glowing with colors which would have made Joseph's coat a monochrome by comparison.

The opening query was always the same: "Well, how goes it?"

The answer was delivered in varying degrees of irritability. Sometimes it would be merely a surly shake of the head; sometimes a weary, almost pathetic, sigh. And again it would be a brief but placid word of confidence, accompanied by a flickering gleam in the faded blue eyes. More than once there was fervid expostulation for the impatience of unreasonable and ignorant folk, as when he pointed out wrathfully that it "took an oyster a devil of a long time to make a pearl!"

Once a month precisely the old man rendered an account, in his fine, cramped hand, of all expenditures. These were remarkable documents, and

Tommy's father, to whom they were regularly forwarded, extracted many a chuckle from them. There would be, for example, an item, "3 ft. copper wire, 18 gauge—9c." And on the next line below, "miscellaneous, $8.65."

Tommy, fearing possible criticism, tried to point out the inadequacy of this sort of bookkeeping. But the old man could not be made to see that his methods were obscure. And too much insistence upon the subject only effected a relapse into injured silence. Fortunately, however, it was manifest in the totals that his economy was meticulous.

All these visits concluded in the same fashion. "Well, keep 'er going," Tommy would say, with a cheerful pat on the shoulder.

Frembach would growl bearishly and mutter something about "next time."

One of Tommy's friends was old Pete McKinnon, who by reason of rheumatism and an upright character served as timekeeper. Frequently he took his luncheon out to the weatherbeaten shed by the gate to chat with the old veteran of other days.

One morning in early February he was sitting beside the stove, listening to Pete discourse upon baseball in the consulship of Plancus, when the face of Ole Jensen, a big Swede, whose acquaintance he had made through a mutual love of skating, ap-

peared at the wicket.

"Good-by," said Jensen in his deep voice when the window was opened.

"Good-by?" echoed Tommy, wondering. The Swede had not been a particularly brilliant workman, but he had been steady and well meaning. "What you talking about?"

"I'm goin'. Laid off." He thrust out his big hand.

"Why — what in the world for?"

Old Pete spoke up in explanation. "They're layin' off a bunch o' men, account o' th' shortage in color. It's only th' new fellers, though."

"Shortage in color?" repeated Tommy.

"Yep. They got more orders up to the office than they can fill. An' they ain't no raw color to be had. Them Germans——"

The time had come! To the surprise of the two men, a broad grin appeared on Tommy's face. "Say, Jensen," he said with what seemed to the big Swede rather inept cheerfulness, "you leave your address with Pete here. You'll be havin' your job back pretty soon, or I miss my guess."

Before he could be questioned, he had sped away.

Mr. Burroughs had not returned from luncheon, and Tommy chafed impatiently as he waited. He watched the outer door, and he began his attack the moment Mr. Burroughs entered.

"Say, Mr. Burroughs," he opened breathlessly, "I hear they're laying off men for lack of material."

"Yes. Why so excited about it?"

"Well, I know where there's a lot of color."

"So? In Berlin, I suppose."

Tommy, in his eagerness, failed to heed the sarcasm. "No," he answered literally, "right here in Chicago."

"Really! At a hundred dollars an ounce, no doubt?"

"No, sir. It'd cost anybody else pretty near that. But the Champion Paint and Varnish Company can have it for just what it cost six months ago."

Burroughs expanded in a chuckle. "Have a cigar, Cass. Settle your nerves."

"I mean it!"

"You mean you're heaping coals of fire on my head for not listening to you before."

"No, sir. I mean just what I say."

"Well — where is it?"

Tommy hesitated; also he blushed. Both things gave an entirely wrong significance to his reply: "I — I don't exactly know *that.*"

Mr. Burroughs' features hardened. "This seems to be a very elaborate joke, Cass. Won't you let me in on it?"

"It's not a joke. Really it isn't."

"Well, if you don't know where the stuff is, per-

haps you can tell me the singular person who owns it."

"Yes, sir. It's me!"

"*You?*"

"Yes."

"What the——" Mr. Burroughs looked almost alarmed. "Here—take *several* cigars! You need a doctor, don't you?"

"No, sir. I'm not kidding. You see, when you couldn't see my suggestion about stocking up on color, I—I rustled around and picked up all I could myself. I—I had a little money."

Mr. Burroughs' jaw dropped. "Cass—you're the most amazing chap I've ever known! You—you mean to say you actually went ahead on that idea of yours?"

"Yes, sir. There wasn't any risk. I knew I could always sell it at the old price. And——"

"And now you're offering to give it away?"

"Oh, no; just what I paid for it."

"That's the same thing." Mr. Burroughs leaned back, puffing hard on his cigar. Then his eyes narrowed, and he favored Tommy with a frigid stare. "Are you playing deeper than it looks, Cass?"

"Deeper? I don't understand."

"Why are you offering this to us for a third of what any one else would give you?"

Tommy scratched his head. "Why—er—it

wouldn't be right, would it, to squeeze you when you can't help yourself?"

"Are you referring to me — or the company?"

"There isn't any difference, is there?"

Mr. Burroughs' fist came down on the desk, and he nearly bit through his cigar. "You beat all!" he ejaculated.

Tommy shrugged his shoulders helplessly, getting very red. "I — I don't want to seem preachy," he stammered uncomfortably, "but I — I — oh, you know what I mean — I think a fellow ought to — to feel as if he was part of the company. I don't amount to anything, of course. But I — well, I like to think of Champion the way I used to think about college."

A slow smile spread over Burroughs' face. "In some ways, Tommy," he said gently, "you're a remarkable business man. And then again — you're ahead of your time."

"It'd be like dipping into the cash box," persisted Tommy doggedly.

Burroughs' smile deepened. "Like many fine characters, my boy, you're a good deal of an ass!"

"I don't ——"

"The company will take that color off your hands ——

"Yes, sir."

"At the present market price."

"But, Mr.——"

"You've already consumed more of my time than was necessary, young man."

"But I can't——"

"You can get out!" A rare smile counterbalanced the ungraciousness of the words.

When the door had at last closed behind the protestations of Tommy, the president of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company sat lost in meditation. Presently he touched a button at his side.

The stenographer who answered it came in, notebook in hand. Usually he was ready with his dictation, and she held her pencil poised. But this time he sat back in his chair, silent, his eyes closed. He opened them at her discreet cough.

"Oh, beg pardon," he murmured absently. "I —I was thinking of something else. A letter to McKee & Berger, please——"

As quickly as he could get to pencil and paper, Tommy sat down to computation of his winnings. The first figures were incredible. That decimal point was misplaced surely! Ridiculous! But repetition brought the same result. Balboa on the peak of Darien was not more proud. Being honest with himself, he was not unaware of the element of chance in his success; being human, he appraised chance at about two per centum of the whole.

It was scarcely possible to accomplish any work that day. Too often his fingers were stilled as his thoughts wandered off in delicious reverie. More than once he caught himself thinking pleasantly of old Pop Farr and the Green Scarf. Had he won it?

That night he found, waiting for him at his boarding house, a note from Dick Morehouse, a classmate, inclosing an invitation from Mr. and Mrs. William Hanshew Rygate to a dinner dance at their home.

With Spartan denial of exceptions, he had hitherto declined all such invitations. He had derived some comfort in the abnegation, by a persuasion that such frivolity as dances accorded ill with the intentions of a serious young man of business; one who had danced all night could not hope to work all day, et cetera. The real reason, however, becomes clear with a little simple arithmetic. He was firmly resolved to live within his salary. And even so slight an excess as the laundering of dress shirts was more than that modest sum could well embrace.

But the happy outcome of his speculation in colors put a different face upon things. He could charter an entire laundry if he so desired! He could ride endlessly in taxis — send orchids — give a dance himself; there was really nothing this side of mere vulgar ostentation that he could not contrive, if he chose!

On the other hand, there was need for celebration. A real need! He seized a sheet of paper forthwith to inform Mr. and Mrs. William Hanshew Rygate with what extraordinary pleasure Mr. Thomas Cass accepted the proffer of their hospitality.

When the time came, it quite renewed his youth to fit himself once more into the singular garments which civilized man has decreed to be one of the concomitants of gayety. He rubbed his smooth, pink cheeks, standing before the mirror. Who'd ever guess, to look at this exquisite, that he was really a bold bandit of finance, with a matter of a couple of thousand or so all but in his pocket? He laughed.

At the Rygates', an impressive tabernacle of brown sandstone on the Drive, he was not greeted with felicitations upon his business acumen. But it was presently evident that an earlier reputation had preceded him. At dinner he found himself placed beside a damsel who, a quick comparison made clear, had been conferred upon him as a mark of honor.

"I've met your sister," she began. "And the Hortons and the Blakes and Roger Coit. I've visited in Cleveland lots."

He was woefully out of practice, but the need was exigent. He lied bravely. "I've heard Marion talk about you — often, Miss — er "— a hasty glance

at her place card saved him—"Miss Sanborn. Er —Cleveland's a nice town, don't you think?"

The salad was served before the topic of mutual friends was entirely exhausted. Then her polite attention to the man on her left gave Tommy an opportunity to consider. He was disturbed to find himself distinctly bored. And, what was worse, he felt reasonably certain that Miss Sanborn found him tedious. There had been signs. Time was, he reflected, when the passing of the soup would have found him on terms of intimacy with so charming a person as this young lady. But times had changed. He was heavy as lead. It was self-evident.

Miss Sanborn had also been considering the situation. She was perplexed. The much-heralded Tommy Cass was undeniably disappointing. He was hard to talk to. But she was persistent and hopeful. She soon reverted to the attack.

Athletics was usually dependable conversationally. "What's the matter with Yale, anyway? That game last fall was simply dreadful."

She cherished no particular interest for football, and she expected an avalanche of dullness in response to her question, but she was not at all prepared for indifference.

"To tell you the truth," he said absently, "I haven't paid much attention to what's going on

down there. I've been unusually busy."

"Oh!" There was a protracted silence. Then, with a faint sigh, she tried again: "You're in business out here, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"It must be awfully interesting." She spoke with exactly the same degree of animation with which she would have said twice two were four. But Tommy's eyes lighted.

"It's great!" he declared.

She had touched the right chord! The inevitability of man's egoism. Obviously, to make Mr. T. Cass talk, he must be made to talk about himself. *Ipse facto,* Mr. Cass was exactly like all other men in a débutante's life. She sighed again.

"What is your business?"

"Paints."

"You must work awfully hard. Dick says he never sees you. He was awfully surprised you came tonight."

"I don't travel on Dick's beat. You see, our factory's 'way out on Diversey, and I don't often get downtown."

"That must be dreadfully hard. I should think you'd miss seeing the other boys."

Tommy grew very earnest. "I'm too busy. I'm working in the shop — really learning the business, you know. And the men are the most important

thing to learn. I spend as much time as I can with them. Why, last Saturday I went skating with a big Swede. A fine chap, too, when you get to know him."

"Really!" Miss Sanborn was young, but experienced; she simulated intense amazement.

Tommy rushed on, headlong: "You bet! I want to tell you, those fellows are just as human as we are — and sometimes a whole lot more!"

"You must have awfully interesting experiences."

"Rather. I feel as if I was getting educated for the first time. I never knew before that business was anything more than making stuff and selling it. Now I'm making the acquaintance of what my boss calls the 'human equation.' I say — I'm not boring you, am I?"

"Oh, indeed not!" Miss Sanborn arched her brows as if in pain that he could make such a suggestion. "I think it's most awfully interesting."

"One gets going, you know; it's hard to know when to stop."

"One who can talk like you can needn't worry."

He was too rapt in his subject to note the flattery. He pressed on, his forehead wrinkled: "The thing that got me most at first was why those fellows hated rich people so. Now, by George, I'm beginning to feel the same way myself! I haven't

got much respect for myself — what I used to be, that is. I was too darned satisfied, if you know what I mean. I thought of working people the way you think of — of — well, horses."

"You're a regular socialist, Mr. Cass!" She laughed musically, much as if she were suggesting that he had a pound of dynamite in either pocket. But he answered quite seriously:

"Maybe I am. A lot of the boys out there are. They give me stuff to read, and I've been to some meetings. But most of the socialists are such nuts! Their ideas make you think of a deafmute tryin' to teach singing. I don't know. It doesn't seem practical."

"I suppose not." Miss Sanborn's eyes came together, and she contrived to look very thoughtful. It would have shocked and amazed Tommy to know that she was really wondering whether her bodice was cut as clumsily as Miriam Rhodes' across the table.

But he was not a mind reader. "I don't think they've got the right medicine," he went on. "I sympathize with their feelings, though. You can't blame 'em. Why, good Lord — just look at the stuff that's been put before us tonight — nibbled at — thrown away ——"

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" she murmured sympathetically.

"It's criminal; that's what it is! Why, I know men who work like horses all day and every day — and can't save enough to keep from starving if they're laid off a week!"

"You don't mean it!"

"I do mean it. And when I say starving I mean starving. I tell you, there's something wrong with the system of things when people like us can have everything we want without working, and people who work like the dickens——"

Miss Sanborn agreed that it was "awful." She also thought that "something ought to be done about it." But when Mrs. Rygate rose, with the signal for the adjournment of the ladies, Miss Sanborn betrayed no excessive regret that the discussion of ways and means must be terminated.

Tommy swallowed his chilled coffee in one gulp.

Upstairs, Miss Sanborn was presently answering queries as to Mr. Cass. "No sense of humor," she observed judiciously between dextrous manipulations of the powder puff. "Terribly serious — and did you notice Peter Carrick? I do wish he'd try coming to a dance sober. It's disgusting! Didn't you nearly *die* when he spilled the champagne? Mrs. Rygate's expression was a scream!" Her cool laugh rippled like an arpeggio.

Over the cigarettes and liqueurs, meanwhile, Tommy was listening to the conversation of the

other young men at the table. At one end was a heated debate on the strategy of the war, distinguished by conspicuous misinformation and frequent reference to "militaryism." Nearer at hand, little knots whispered together with the discretion which, among gentlemen, accompanies talk of femininity. And around himself gathered a respectful quartet, insistent upon a discussion of the fine art of football.

Save for the one topic of the war, it was exactly like the similar gatherings he had attended in great numbers ever since his promotion to long trousers. But it came over him with a kind of pang that he was not really a part of it. He was detached and a little bored. And he was frankly relieved when it was suggested that they join the ladies.

He found the dancing much easier. He liked to dance, and it was a long time since he had had the opportunity. One didn't have to talk; in fact, it was better not to.

He was catholic in his favors, and it was presently the verdict among the feminine portion of the party that Miss Sanborn's opinion of him had not been quite adequate. He danced with the grace of a perfect physique and a natural ear for rhythm. Miss Sanborn herself soon reversed her decision. After their third dance, she even went so far as to suggest his coming to see her. His success was

best indicated by the fact that Dick Morehouse, to whom Miss Sanborn was the embodiment of all earthly perfection, and who danced atrociously, more than half regretted that he had persuaded Tommy to come.

Tommy had had every intention of leaving early. But a perfect orchestra and the odor of heliotrope makes even the most resolute forget the passage of time. It was not until the strains of "Good Night, Ladies" floated from the violins that he recalled his intention.

He held out his hand to his partner. "It's been great!"

Before she could make reply, Morehouse, fairly radiating wrath, had shouldered between them. "You give me the encore," he snapped. Tommy grinned as they jerked away. The malevolent glare with which he had been favored was a justification and a fitting climax for the evening.

It was not many hours removed from daylight when Tommy arrived at the bare little room he called home. He felt singularly lonely. His mind was filled with a complexity of ideas, and he yearned for some one at hand to listen in sympathy while he poured them out.

He undressed slowly, the sporadic moments of exertion contrasting with long stretches where he sat on the edge of the bed, staring into vacancy.

He was not at all sleepy. Presently the craving for expression became irresistible. It occurred to him that he had not written to his father in a long time.

Acting on the impulse, he extracted the old portfolio — companion of his college days — from the trunk, and began a letter.

It started out chronologically — in reverse. That is, the first paragraph dealt with the sweet smile of Miss Sanborn at parting. That made him think of the other guests at the Rygates, who had formed her background. He wrote:

They're nice people, but empty as an old paint barrel. They talk a lot — but they never say anything — nothing worth while. It's gossip and twaddle. They call the war *dreadful*. Think of it! It makes me think of an ass I met once who said the sunrise was "rather pretty."

He reread that paragraph, and it sounded rather patronizing. So he added:

The worst of it is, I used to be just like that myself. I thought the only people in the world were the ones I knew — and their friends. Gosh — we're nothing but the nickel plate on the engine! And we never even give a thought to the coal. . . . .

The simile he thought apt, and he expatiated upon it. In nervous, choppy sentences he told of his discovery of the bigness of the world. He violated syntax ruthlessly. But he wrote from the heart,

and so contrived to convey an extremely vivid picture of what life had begun to mean to him.

He had much to say — extravagant at times, a trifle incoherent, not always just or well balanced; but burning with the fervor of youth. The passionate words made the wise old man who read them smile, and again they brought to his eyes something like tears. None knew better than he how much humanity, on its sweating struggle upward, had need of the selfless emotion of the young, even as it had need of the dry caution of those older and more reasoning.

Tommy, writing hotly of the ills of men, turned insensibly from the general to the specific. Tritely he continued:

> Those fellows I'm working with are just as fine at heart as any men I ever knew in college. They're rough, of course, but that's just the surface. Underneath, they're just like other men. Sometimes I think they're better. Certainly they're more generous.

And then presently he was saying:

> That Miss Manard — I believe I've mentioned her before — is certainly a wonder. I'm glad I went to this blowout tonight. It makes me appreciate her better. Those girls, like Dick's friend, Miss Sanborn — they're pretty and good and all that, but gosh! they've got minds like chickadees! And you've got to handle them just so. There's a regular stock lingo prescribed for every occasion. Miss Manard's dif-

ferent. You talk to her like you'd talk to a man. Only she's smarter than most men I know. She's got more ideas in a minute than the average fellow like me has in a year. And she doesn't just echo somebody else, like a lot of highbrows do. She thinks for herself — and she thinks through. Dad, she's a wonder!

There was a surprising amount of information to be conveyed about Miss Manard — repetitions, inevitably, but poured out with such enthusiasm and naïveté that one could not be critical; even if he would. Growing conscious of his garrulity, he explained:

You might think from all this that I was with her most of the time. No such luck! She hasn't any time to waste on me. I'm only a cub, you know — and I'm kept pretty busy myself. I go out to shows with her sometimes. She always insists on making it Dutch. You see, she really thinks I have nothing to live on but my weekly insult in the way of salary. I'd like to surprise her, only I'm afraid she wouldn't have anything more to do with me if I did. Not the same way, I mean.

Tommy was not aware of being particularly revelational. And he ceased writing only when he discovered that there was no more writing paper.

With a sigh of weariness, he folded up the numerous sheets of the epistle and put them in the envelope. Then he remembered that he had forgotten something, and he took the last sheet out.

His afterthought was both characteristic and significant. In the very fine hand required to get them into one corner, he wrote perhaps a dozen words concerning his coup in the color market. His success, he attributed briefly to luck, and of Mr. Burroughs he said that he was "darned generous."

The pink vanguard of dawn was creeping through the window when he finally tumbled into bed.

"Maybe I am a kid," he murmured sleepily, and perhaps irrelevantly. "But I'm growing up. You wait."

One guesses that the thought was not directed at his father.

CHAPTER IX

MR. CASS, senior, read that letter from his son with conflicting emotions. Pride was one of them. There were others — not so specific. He denied himself to callers while he pondered over the singular document. There were chuckles. And, again, heavy sighs. But when he closed up his desk and went home that night, his resolution had evolved out of the chaos of doubt. His taking his wife into consultation was Napoleonic; his mind was quite made up.

Without comment, he gave her the letter to read.

"Well — and what's to be done?" he asked when she had finished.

"He — he's infatuated with the girl!" cried Mrs. Cass in the tone she would have employed to confess that he had cracked a safe.

"You think so?"

"It's self-evident. Oh, dear!"

"What would you advise?"

"It was a mistake his ever going out there. I said so at the time. Such a foolish thing ——"

"Nevertheless, he's there," supplied Mr. Cass dryly.

"Send for him at once. We must get him away from her influence."

"Haven't much confidence in him, have you, Mary?"

"He's only a boy. Any woman could twist him around her finger."

Mr. Cass pursed his lips. "I'm not so sure. He seems to me to be maturing rapidly."

Tommy's mother could not view her boy so dispassionately. "He's just at the impressionable age," she protested. "He ought to be at home."

Mr. Cass smiled. "I was a long way from home when I met you, Mary," he said softly.

"That was entirely different. There were mutual friends. We knew a great deal about each other."

"But we didn't act on the advice of others. As I remember, I——"

"You were an entirely different kind of boy."

"You advise, then, that I send for him?"

"Certainly."

"Suppose he refuses to come?"

She was aghast at the thought. "Oh, he wouldn't do that!"

"He might."

"Oh, my poor baby!" Mrs. Cass collapsed in the chair, the tears welling into her eyes. "What *can* we do!"

Mr. Cass spoke absently as though deep in

thought: "I'd rather like to meet *her.*"

His wife looked up, suddenly hopeful. "You mean — you — you might buy her off?" She was extremely romantic and not very sophisticated.

He laughed. "Hardly, my dear. I don't gather from the lad's letter that she's any scheming vampire."

"But she might be."

"I suppose one way to find out would be to — to ask her."

"What do you mean?"

"I'd like to have her under observation for a few days. She might be just the girl for him, after all."

"This isn't a time to be flippant!"

"I'm not. I'm very serious."

Mrs. Cass manifested alarm. "Henry, what is in your mind?"

He smoked thoughtfully for a moment before he replied: "I've been considering the thing, Mary. How would it be to have her visit us?"

"Why not visit her?"

He shook his head. "Not intimate enough. I should want to see her off parade — take breakfast with her, for instance."

Mrs. Cass gazed around anxiously. "You want me to ask her — *here?*"

"No, dear. I don't think she'd come if you did."

"Then why——"

"Hold on! Let me outline my plan. I suggest that you and Marion get up a party to spend a few days at the cabin — winter sports in the woods, you know."

"Henry! Are you quite mad?"

"Not at all. Invite the most charming young girls you know. And include Miss Manard."

"But, Henry, why go running 'way up in Michigan? Why wouldn't——"

He sighed patiently. "You don't understand my scheme."

"I certainly do not!"

"It's very simple. You spoke of this young woman as an adventuress, planning to run off with your darling boy. Well, if she is, his peril is in direct ratio to her knowledge of his value. As a ten-dollar-a-week cub, he's reasonably safe. As Thomas Cass, second, however, he becomes a pearl of price. You'll grant that, won't you?"

"Yes, of course. But——"

"Well, then, if she visits us here——" He swept his arm around the great library, filled with furniture of richly carved Circassian walnut and hung with the rare brocades which were a nation's pride. "She will understand what apparently she does not understand now."

"Oh — I see!"

"I knew you would," he murmured diplomatically. "If we go up to the woods, we can maintain the awful secret. High boots and sweaters will be an excellent disguise. I can pass for a well-to-do greengrocer. And Marion can forget temporarily that she ever saw Miss Finch's."

"But Tommy?"

"I think he can safely be trusted."

Mrs. Cass twined her hands nervously. "I declare, it's the strangest performance!"

He smiled quizzically. "My dear, the world is full of strange performances. Even business. Do you know my method of determining wheat from chaff in applicants for positions at the bank?"

"You don't ask them to visit you in the wilds of Michigan, I'll warrant!" she snapped with grim humor.

"No, but it's unusual, none the less. I have a pad of scratch paper laid out on my desk and a few sheets of the bank's engraved stationery beside it. Then I casually ask the applicant to write his name. If he uses the letterhead, his goose is thereby cooked. He is too extravagant for banking. I've found the plan very useful."

A sudden, distressing thought made Mrs. Cass inattentive. "But suppose, Henry — suppose this Manard person should not be impossible!"

"Well?"

"This plan of yours might not work at all. He's an obstinate boy, you know."

"He might be more infatuated than ever, eh?"

"Yes. Have you thought of that? What would you do?"

Mr. Cass picked up a book from the table and thumbed its leaves. "In that case, Mary," he said easily, "I should be inclined to feel that it was strictly his affair."

"Oh, Henry!" Mrs. Cass broke into open weeping.

He squirmed uncomfortably. "You'll write her at once, won't you?"

Her reply was undistinguishable.

Nevertheless, she did write — the next day. It was necessary, of course, that she take Marion into her confidence, which was fortunate. The latter was a young person of spirit and understanding, and when she fully grasped the significance of the scheme she entered into it whole-heartedly. Under her revision, her mother's note of invitation was transformed from a rather ominous and chilling document, with a stiff formality which most assuredly would have defeated its purpose, into a warm and friendly appeal that Tommy's pleasant intimacy might be shared by those to whom all the things of his life were dear. It was such a letter as no man could write, and very few women. Mrs.

Cass, seeing in it only a different phraseology from her own effort, copied it in her stiffly regular hand, and sent it off. Marion, not wholly satisfied, added a postscript in the form of a note sent separately.

Simultaneously she made careful arrangements for the other guests. Perceiving very clearly the purpose of her father's plan, she extended her invitations judiciously. In testimony to Tommy's love of sport, she included Nell Whitney. Edith Byram, she recalled, possessed a voice which Tommy had once likened to a flute on the lips of a seraph. And Corinne Mason had gone to the Prom with him, with consequences, it came back on her now, believed serious at the time. Each one of the girls had figured prominently in Tommy's life. It was quite fitting that they should cancel whatever indebtedness existed by acting as counter-irritants for his salvation — and without knowing it. Marion had a sense of humor; the notion tickled her hugely.

It was not, of course, necessary to tell them to exercise all their available charms. They being feminine, and Tommy being Tommy, they would see to that inevitably. Nor was it necessary to put them on their guard against revelation of the very thing they were being taken all the way to Michigan to conceal. Nell Whitney, though the daughter of a prominent divine, was as boisterous and given

to mannish slang as if she had been bred in the Bowery. Edith Byram, despite parents whose wealth was a byword, affected parsimony in her conversation. And Corinne Mason was perfectly safe, because she was always content to let her face and figure do her talking for her.

The feminine contingent selected, and acceptances secured, Marion felt that the really important part of her task was completed. The men did not count particularly. Of those she chose she saw to it merely that they were acceptable to the girls — and no more. It would not do to have the singleness of purpose of the affair marred by anything like competition!

Mr. Cass, having assured himself that the outcome of the matter was in the capable hands of his daughter, said no more. He contented himself with soothing his wife's periodic outbursts of fretful alarm.

Miss Manard's feelings, upon receipt of the invitation, made a mockery of language. She went through a very spectrum of emotion, ending finally in ultra-violent regions of amazement. When she had read it at least a dozen times she took up the telephone in a trembling hand and summoned Tommy.

He came in, wondering. It was the first time

she had ever called him like this. And when he saw the expression on her face he burst out in alarm:

"Great Scott — what's up?"

For reply she handed him his mother's letter and Marion's postscript. "Are you responsible?" she asked almost accusingly.

When he had read enough to grasp the meaning of her question, he shook his head emphatically. "It's Marion," he said with assurance. "Good little sis! It's just like her."

"She's very kind," said Miss Manard mechanically.

"She's a corker! She — you'll go, of course?"

Miss Manard laughed — a trifle uncomfortably. "Oh, Tommy ——"

"You bet you will!" His eyes lighted. "We'll have a bully time."

She shook her head. "Oh — I couldn't!"

"Why not?" His jaw stuck out belligerently.

"I — couldn't give the time. I ——"

"Bosh! Things are slack here. Besides, it'll do you good. You'll be worth more when you get back."

"I — I haven't anything to wear."

"Gee whiz! You don't need anything. A sweater, heavy shoes, pair o' skates — what else do you want?"

"I'd love to, but ——" She sighed pensively.

"Aw, come on! It's great up there now. There's snowshoeing and hockey — on the smoothest ice you ever saw — and — gosh! we'd have a corking time. And I'd love to have you meet the folks. You'd like dad. Get him in front of the ol' log fire, with the apples roasting and a little hot toddy to oil the engine, and he's the greatest little story-teller you ever heard in your life."

"I'd love that," she murmured, her eyes far away.

"Then let's go to it. I'll wire 'em. Burroughs won't kick, will he?"

"I don't think so, but——"

"Oh, can the buts! Say, did you ever ski? There's some wonderful hills up there. And the air! Gee, to breathe that ozone after this smoke would be like heaven! And those girls Marion's got are — but you don't care about the girls, I suppose. Let me tell you about the fellows. There's Joe Aishton and——"

"Don't be silly, Tommy. If I went, it would be——"

"Then you are thinking of it?" he queried eagerly.

"Of course I'm thinking of it."

"Then quit thinking — and *do* it."

"You don't know how I'm tempted."

He looked aggrieved. "I must say you seem pretty strong at resisting temptation."

"It only seems so," she laughed. "I — I feel myself slipping. Oh, Tommy," she burst out passionately, "I — I'm *crazy* to go!"

"Well, then, for the love o' Mike — why don't you?"

Her eyes sought the distance, and her voice became vaguely sad. "It's like a vision of heaven; you're right. It — it takes me back to long ago. I haven't tobogganed and all that since I was a little girl. Oh, Tommy, why did you speak about apples toasting on a log fire? I thought you were a friend!"

"I won't go unless you do," he declared stubbornly.

She seemed not to hear him. Manifestly her thoughts were far away. "Sometimes I feel as if I'd worked for hundreds of years," she said. "I suppose I'm silly, but I — I — oh, how I'd like to play for just a little while! You don't know how this grind gets on my nerves sometimes. The office seems so small and dingy — life seems dingy! Youth goes skipping by, and I sit here, looking out of my window — just looking. I thought when I was little that people grew old gradually. But I didn't. I got middle-aged overnight. It was work — work — work. And youth always playing just outside the window. I — I wasn't invited to the party." She touched her eyes with her handker-

chief. "Oh, Tommy, I'm a perfect idiot! But I —I c-can't h-help it!"

"You poor kid!" he muttered huskily. He choked and swallowed hard. "Come on up to the frozen pines and forget it!"

She was herself in an instant. "I ought to be put in a closet for a week," she said severely. "The idea! Snivelling like that. I——" She broke down again. "It's just that I—I get so awfully *tired* sometimes," she explained unsteadily. "It—it's nerves, I suppose. I——"

He put his hand on her shoulder, and his own voice was far from even. "You'll be in a daffy house if you don't give the old machine a rest," he said with an effort at jauntiness. "I'm pretty sick of things as they are myself. Let's chuck it all and go up where the North Star hangs out." It might have been the mere physical fact of his standing above her, or perhaps only her momentary loss of poise. At any rate, he felt an unwonted sense of protectiveness. It was singularly pleasant. The capable, rather frostily superior Miss Manard was suddenly just a tired, not very happy, little girl who needed comforting—masculine comforting. He patted her gently, and a long, tremulous breath escaped him. "That's settled," he said emphatically. "You're going—and that's all there is to it!"

Miss Manard, too, must have been under the spell of the situation, for if she uttered any further protest it was not audible.

More urgent matters came up to demand Tommy's attention, and it was not until the next day that he found an opportunity to broach the matter of leave to Mr. Burroughs.

The latter looked up quickly from under his brows at the conclusion of the little speech. It occurred to Tommy that Mr. Burroughs was rather more surprised and perturbed than the simple request would warrant.

"You want a week off, eh?" said the latter, seemingly striving to maintain an impassive exterior. Tommy observed that his fingers twitched nervously.

"Yes, sir. That is, I'll take my vacation now instead of next summer."

"Has it — er — occurred to you that you might not be with the company next summer?" asked Mr. Burroughs coldly.

Tommy was startled. "Why, no, sir — it hadn't," he admitted frankly.

"Vacations are not usually granted before an employee has spent a year with the concern."

"No, I — I suppose not." Tommy was crestfallen.

"You're very anxious to go?" It seemed as if

Mr. Burroughs' cold gray eyes bored him with unwonted keenness.

"Yes, sir. Very."

Mr. Burroughs said nothing for a moment. He stared at his desk, tapping jerkily on its plate-glass surface with his pencil. Then his teeth clicked sharply.

"All right. Go."

Tommy mumbled his thanks, and left the office hurriedly. He was too perplexed to be hurt or angry, but he could not rid himself of a feeling that Mr. Burroughs' treatment of him had been rather more caustic than the occasion required.

Then, as he pondered over the matter, a ray of light entered his puzzled brain, and he smote his thigh. An amazed chuckle escaped him. "The ol' son of a gun!" he whispered softly.

It would have amazed him more had he known that at that particular moment Mr. Burroughs, the self-contained, the imperturbable, the emotionless machine, was pacing his office like a caged panther, gnawing at his lip, his eyes contracted fiercely, and on his brow the black scowl which betokened the blacker soul within.

Tommy always thought of Mr. Burroughs as "old." And Mr. Burroughs always thought of Tommy as "young." Both, of course, were mistaken.

It afforded Tommy a singular thrill to purchase the tickets for himself and Miss Manard. And with the elaborate delicacy of youth he made it a point to secure berths at opposite ends of the car. She was intuitive, and understood the maneuver at once, albeit none the less appreciative of the fineness of spirit which had inspired it.

Mr. Cass, senior, accompanied by Marion, met the train next morning. Their greeting was brief, but genuine. Tommy was particularly relieved at his sister's cordiality. He had been troubled with unpleasant forebodings.

Leaving the others, he went off to see about the trunks. When he returned it was evident that all restraint had vanished. A kind of intimacy had already been established, and it was a gay and genial party which climbed into the big cutter for the long drive to the cabin.

"Gee!" cried Tommy. "The snow's actually white!"

"What did you think it would be?" asked his sister.

"It's black in Chicago."

The bells on the harness tinkled a merry obligato to the laughter sparkling in the sleigh. The runners creaked frostily, and the vapor rose from the horses' nostrils like feathery plumes.

Tommy inhaled deeply of the crisp air. "This

is the life! Gosh, I've got an appetite already. How 'bout you, Anne?"

Mr. Cass looked away. So they'd gotten to first names! He had learned something already.

Breakfast was waiting, with Mrs. Cass at the head of the table. Tommy kissed his mother — or thought he did; he was, in fact, quite passive in the ceremony — as sons usually are — and Miss Manard accepted her hostess' welcome with quiet self-possession.

There was a moment of constraint, following Anne's presentation to the other guests who were already down. But the platter of golden eggs and hospitable fragrance of smoking bacon saved the situation. One by one the belated members of the party drifted in, and thus the assimilation of the stranger was accomplished more easily and more rapidly than had there been a stiffly conventional round of introductions at one time.

Tommy was conscious of a pleasant atmosphere, as he was of a relief from all his disagreeable presentiments. He was not at all aware, of course, that much of this pleasant atmosphere was the result of definite premeditation on the part of his father. "We shall make her feel at home," Mr. Cass had suggested, "by presenting ourselves in small doses."

When the last flapjack had floated into memory

on a river of amber sirup, they adjourned to the crackling fire in the other room.

"I haven't enjoyed the smell of birch logs in years," sighed Tommy contentedly, standing with legs apart before the great fireplace of field stones. "It's great!"

Mrs. Cass, oppressed by her obligations, and always practical, had taken Miss Manard aside. "The others are going out skiing this morning. Perhaps you'd prefer to get rested first, after your tiresome trip?"

Edith Byram, lazily ensconced in a chaise longue, added her encouragement to indolence. "I'm not up to the strenuous life this morning myself. I have some new magazines, Miss Manard. If you care——"

Miss Manard appeared to hesitate, and Tommy entered the discussion. "If you want to loaf, why —loaf. It's do as you please in this crowd, you know."

But Miss Manard was not tempted as he supposed. "If my trunk is here," she said, "and the others will wait while I change, I—think I'd like to ski."

Tommy exhibited his elation. "Sure, it's here. Show Anne her room, sis—and fix her up with anything she needs." He tossed the end of his cigarette in the fireplace, and, followed by the other boys,

went out to his own quarters.

Behind him a brief discussion took place. Miss Byram murmured something about "simply stunning," and resumed her novel. Nell Whitney, replacing a broken lace in her shoe, voiced her approval of Miss Manard's surprisingly athletic figure. And Mrs. Cass observed judiciously that she was a "very charming person." Then she followed her daughter, conscientiously desirous of rendering assistance. Mr. Cass, who said nothing, but thought much, went to his study to dispose of the morning mail.

When none were left but Miss Byram and Miss Whitney, the former's languor deserted her. She sat up briskly.

"What d'ye think of her, Nell?"

"Good sort, I guess," mumbled Nell through a mouthful of lacing.

"Think she'll like this sort of thing?"

Nell shrugged her muscular shoulders. Then she glanced down at her own well-worn costume, and grinned. "I s'pose she'll appear in the very latest thing in outdoor wear."

She was mistaken. When Anne reappeared presently she was in a garb more service marked by far than Miss Whitney's. She did not apologize for it, as if she knew very well how extremely fit and capable she looked. Miss Whitney, keen-eyed and

professional, appraised the newcomer, from her strong, rubber-soled moccasins to the obviously old, but obviously serviceable, toque of gray lamb's wool.

There was no time for talk. Every one at once turned to with a will at loading skis, luncheon hamper, stove, and what not into the capacious old cutter. And in a very few minutes, with Tommy, whistling gayly, at the reins, they sped off, a merry crew, buried to their noses in an assortment of ancient furs and raveled blankets that made them look like an animated rag bag. Miss Manard, who had been doing a deal of speculating on her own account, decided that her first assumptions regarding Tommy and his family needed amplification. He was not poor; that was plain. His people clearly were of that comfortable, pleasure-loving, well-bred class which is, if not the froth, certainly the cream of the land, unostentatious and liberal, making what it has go far and finding fullness in all the days of life. Had Mr. Cass been informed of her conclusion, he would have been well pleased. It was for precisely such a conclusion that he had planned.

There were two hills at their destination, one long and gently sloping, the other shorter, but quite steep. The former, suggested Tommy, was for the novice —which practically included most of the party. Anne thanked him gravely for his warning, and then, as soon as her skis were adjusted, proceeded

to make her way up the hill against which he had warned her.

He thought she had misunderstood. Miss Whitney, who had ventured upon that hill once or twice, was frankly alarmed. "You oughtn't to let her, Tommy."

"Hey, there!" he shouted. "Don't try that."

But Miss Manard merely waved blithely in answer to their calls, and kept on with the ascent.

A moment later she had reached the top, and stood silhouetted against the sky. Then, with another wave of the hand, she began the slide. The steepness was considerable, and she was soon moving rapidly. And then, just as she passed the fascinated knot of watchers, the expected happened. Nothing on earth is more sudden than a ski fall; one rarely sees the cause. And so all their startled eyes took in was a rolling, bouncing tangle of legs and twisted skis go shooting down the hill like a small avalanche.

Tommy was the first to reach her. His voice trembled as he questioned her. But he could not forbear to add, reprovingly: "I think you'd better take my advice until you get the hang of it."

It was a minute or two before she regained her breath. "That was a beautiful tumble, wasn't it?" she panted. Then she knelt down and began readjusting the straps of her skis.

Miss Whitney, who had come up in time to see this, added her disapproval: "I wouldn't fasten them if I were you. It's dangerous."

Anne's answer was polite, but firm: "Thanks. But you can't ski decently if they're loose." Her cheeks were flaming scarlet, and her lips were compressed. She rose to her feet and smoothed her disarranged attire.

"Don't you think you'd better rest a bit?" queried Tommy anxiously.

She merely shook her head, smiling, and, pole in hand, began to move off.

"What are you doing now?"

The answer was flung over her shoulder grimly: "Trying it again!"

Tommy's mouth opened in expostulation: "But ——"

Joe Aishton, one of the other boys, who customarily did his skiing on the level, applauded vigorously:

"You're *there,* Miss Manard! By Jiminy, you are!"

Plodding stubbornly up the ascent, she waved back at him. The gesture angered Tommy. "Aw, shut up, Aishton!" he growled. "There's no sense in being foolhardy, you know. She — she might break something."

Anne quickly reached the summit. She turned,

her slim figure black against the snow, and waved again. Tommy cupped his hands about his mouth to shout a last protest. It was too late. She was already coming down.

He wanted to turn his head away from the inevitable. But something held him fascinated. She was flying now with the speed of a hawk, her outstretched arms curiously like wings. She passed the watching group, a mere streak of gray, their eyes following anxiously. Tommy stood only a moment. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he plunged down through the snow in pursuit.

But there was no rescue needed this time. Miss Manard had already reached the foot of the hill. A sudden twist of the skis, amazingly under control, and she had stopped abruptly — still on her feet. It was perfection from start to finish!

Tommy met her returning up the hill. "You're no beginner!" he declared accusingly.

She laughed, her cheeks aglow. "Oh, dear, no! I was just out of practice, that's all."

She received the plaudits of the others quietly. "I did a lot of this when I was a little girl," she explained almost apologetically.

How very much she had done was made increasingly apparent. Even Miss Whitney was soon asking for pointers. The solicitude they had at first manifested for the stranger soon became frank re-

spect, and culminated finally in dumb amazement when she suggested impressing the men into the task of making a jump.

They lacked implements, but they had plenty of enthusiasm, and by rolling huge snowballs together they managed to achieve a satisfactory makeshift. When it was completed and smoothed off to her taste, she proceeded to climb the hill for a trial.

Tommy implored her not to do it. "Let Aishton or Keyster or somebody break his fool neck — not you!" he wailed.

She merely smiled, and examined the fastenings of her skis. When she reached the summit she turned and blew a kiss toward them from her slim fingers. Then, without further delay, she began the descent. Bending low as her speed increased, she reached the jump. A quick spring, and she soared in the air like a swallow, striking the ground again a rod or two below and skimming on with perfect grace to the foot of the hill.

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed Tommy, his eyes widening.

Then a certain hardness settled over his features, and he turned to climb rapidly up the hill. To laughing queries as to his purpose, he made no answer. But a moment later they understood. He was not going to be outdone by a mere slip of a girl in a gray lamb's wool toque!

He started well, and he took the jump satisfactorily. But when he struck the declivity below —— Afterward Anne soothed him with her explanation that the snow had thawed somewhat, becoming wet and sticky, which made his skis catch, overbalancing him. Whatever the cause, Tommy was merely conscious of the skies coming down to smite him. He was buffeted in every inch of his anatomy, and his legs seemed no longer a part of him. He pulled himself together, and dug the snow out of his eyes.

"S-some tumble!" he muttered bravely when the crowd reached him.

"You've scraped your forehead!" cried Miss Manard. Tommy grinned. He would cheerfully have suffered far worse to evoke such tenderness as he felt in her voice. He tried to say as much.

But she was too occupied in wiping the blood away and removing his skis to pay any attention to such nonsense. And when he persisted she turned to the others: "I think that ought to do us for the day, people — don't you? It'll be dark before we get home."

It was considerably colder, despite Miss Manard's amiable theory of the "thaw," and the others assented readily. Tommy smiled, or, rather, he tried to smile; a rapidly enlarging lip made smiling impracticable. Marvels had certainly been accomplished in a short time. The rather difficult alien

of the morning had by late afternoon became undisputed mistress of the party. It was she who superintended the packing of their paraphernalia and saw that all refuse from their luncheon was neatly burned, and when Tommy essayed to climb into the driver's seat it was she who prevented, informing him quietly that Mr. Aishton would drive, he — Tommy — needing repose.

Tommy felt sadly shaken up in all truth, but he was not nearly so *hors de combat* as he permitted himself to appear. It was undeniably pleasant, if a trifle humiliating, to allow himself to be sympathized with and tucked in very gently among the furs. He blushed at the unfeeling gibes of the less temerarious Aishton, but he was quite satisfied with the price of ignominy when it brought Anne's condolence and Anne herself beside him.

The forest rang with gay chatter during the first part of the drive home. But toward the end, as the sun went down, it grew extremely cold, and silence fell among them. As the purple shadows lengthened in the trees, the only sounds were the frosty jingle of the bells and the rhythmic pound of the horses' hoofs on the frozen snow.

In the discreet sanctity of the enveloping furs Tommy's hand sought Miss Manard's. And presently, with a shiver at his own temerity, he found it. His eyes met hers at the same time. He did not

hold either for long. But there was time for a quick pressure of the one and the briefest of questions in the flash of the other. Then she turned her head, and her hand slipped away. He assured himself fervently that he was a fool for thinking such a thing, but a conviction persisted of a response in her fingers and an answering gleam in her eyes. He dallied with the thought. Why, if it gave him such an ecstasy of pleasure, should he not dally with it, he asked himself. Even if, conceivably, he were mistaken in the fact, there was still pleasure in the thought.

A few minutes later his reverie ended. With a mellow flourish of the bells, they drew up at the cabin and trooped in to the warm comfort of lamplight and smoldering fire.

Mrs. Cass innocently awoke their frozen risibilities with her first words. "I do hope you took good care of Miss Manard," she said, bustling about with hot tea.

Marion, disposing of a huge piece of cake, became hysterical. "Look at Tom's face, mother. See how Miss Manard took care of him!"

Tommy submitted ungraciously to a maternal inspection of his countenance, and "kidding by the entire company," as he expressed it. Anne, however, came to his support with a brief but effective observation that "no one else tried it." That ef-

fectually changed the topic, and a little later the party separated to dress for dinner.

At this point, Edith Byram came into the picture. During tea she had been to some extent in shadow. But when she floated into the dining room, as fragile and lovely as an orchid and gowned as delicately, Tommy's eyes sparkled in appreciation. His mouth opened to tell her, in his frank way, the impression she had made upon him. But before he could speak he caught sight of Anne standing behind her in the doorway.

He could not possibly have described a detail of what she wore, from slippers to coiffure. He saw only a general vision of perfection, limned in old rose and ivory. His tongue was tied. He could have complimented Edith, but complimenting Anne was like spouting empty phrases at an exquisite landscape. One merely offered homage — silently.

At dinner he sat by Corinne Mason, charming, as always, in her simple, unaffected wholesomeness. But they were well through the roast before she succeeded in penetrating his rapt detachment and evoked from him an attention even decently courteous. Once started, however, he talked freely enough. But so impersonally! The note of "me" and "thee" which had once formed the staple between them was never sounded. He told her minutely of his work — and interestingly, too. He

inquired, with punctiliousness, as to the ways she trod in the world. But not for an instant was he the Tommy who had strolled with her in the moonlight of a summer evening, underneath the old campus elms, and pressed upon her, with vows too fervent to be literal, the stewardship of his fraternity pin.

After dinner they gathered around the great hearth for coffee and cigarettes, luxuriating in the genial shadows. The stern north wind rushed and whistled in the pines outside, accentuating the pleasant comfort of the fireside.

Miss Byram presently took her place at the piano. And from her throat soft, crooning melodies began to pour in a voice of liquid silver. Her long fingers floated on over the keys into bits of MacDowell, a little Grieg, a snatch of Debussy, and when the spirit of these Northmen grew too militant she shifted suddenly to a plaintive lullaby, born on the beaches of the Mediterranean, and again some nameless, wistful song of the plantations.

She sang superbly, with that artless spontaneity which is the fruit of years of weary labor, and each time she essayed to stop they urged her on. The old spell seized Tommy again. When, for variety, she slipped into a dashing, barbaric marching chant from Hungary his pulses quickened. And when, for finale, her silken contralto softened in a haunt-

ing ballad, poignant with the mysterious, ineffable melancholy of the Celt, his eyes were moist. The song was of fairies and still waters and misty legends of days long dead, and she herself seemed strangely compact of its quality. One forgot the piano as a thing of wood and wires. One forgot Edith as on the whole a rather indolent and ineffectual person of flesh and blood. She was music incarnate. There was only a consciousness of sweet witchery, numbing the senses, exalting the soul. For though she scarcely knew it herself, Edith possessed that magic of genius which dulls the mind to means; she was the artist veritably.

But she knew when to stop. With a far-away smile she rose from the instrument, and no importunities could prevail upon her to continue.

It was, perhaps, an anticlimax, though one of which life is made, that caused the phonograph to succeed her. A lively tune, snapping with syncopation, and played on a battery of full-throated accordions, shattered the cathedral quiet which had settled on the party.

The effect was electric. Rugs were rolled up and furniture quickly pushed to one side. In a twinkling vague stirrings of the soul had given place to the nimble patter of feet. The serene purity of the dominant third had faded, crushed, before the vigorous onslaught of rhythm from a supposititious

Hawaii. Reverence at the high altar was done; carnival was on.

Tommy danced first with Corinne Mason. The ceremony was perfunctory — which she, without resentment, quite understood. As soon as was decent he sought out Anne. She was with Aishton. The latter's reluctance to give her up was plainly inspired by more than mere politeness. In another moment Tommy knew why.

"Gee, but you're a good dancer!" he exclaimed as they waited for the crank to be turned for another encore.

She laughed. "Surprised?"

"Of course not. Only——"

"Only what?"

"Well, I — I hadn't thought of you as a dancing girl somehow." He blushed in confusion.

"I've told you often, Tommy. You really don't know me at all."

The music started up its blare again, and Tommy ceased thinking in the utter satisfaction of motion. It was not until three numbers had been played that he became rational again.

"Good Lord!" he cried, appalled. "I've simply got to dance with the other girls." The same resolve had become increasingly compelling to the other men, and good intentions were not much longer left in his own hands.

Politely, and quite woodenly, he favored each damsel in the room, and at the first feasible opportunity returned to Anne. But there was time for only one perfect dance before the clock sounded ten, which, by tacit consent and the wise dictum of Mrs. Cass, was the hour for retiring.

"Shucks!" muttered Tommy gloomily.

Miss Manard's smile was enigmatic. "Good night, Tommy."

Aishton, with whom Tommy shared quarters, was voluble in his enthusiasm. "That Manard girl is certainly *there!*" he declared when they were alone.

"Uh-huh!" Tommy was not responsive. He felt it profanation for any one else to discuss her, even in enthusiasm.

Aishton was undeterred. "She can do everything. Never saw a girl like her. And Marion says she's a high mucky-muck in your company, too."

Aishton suddenly realized that he was being snubbed. "You've got a swell-looking face, Cass!" he chuckled.

Tommy turned out the light. "So? Well—*nature* didn't make it that way."

Mrs. Cass, after seeing to it that her young charges were located and comfortable, returned to her husband, awaiting her by the embers of the

fire. There were matters of moment to discuss with him.

"Well," she began briskly, poising herself on the arm of his chair, "what do you think?"

He lighted a fresh cigar deliberately. "Surprised — and pleased," he replied.

"Why pleased?"

"Remarkably attractive," he murmured as if to himself. "Don't you agree?"

"I do, indeed; but why are you pleased?"

"She might not have been."

She was annoyed. "Henry, *do* be serious!"

"Certainly, my dear."

"Do you want him to marry her?"

He reflected for a moment. "Umn — I suppose not."

"Well — he will if we don't do something."

"What would you suggest?"

She passed her hand over her smooth forehead. "I — I don't know. He doesn't pay any attention to the other girls."

"She constitutes rather severe competition, doesn't she?" He laughed grimly.

"Suppose he says he means to marry her — what?"

He chuckled. "She may not want him."

Mrs. Cass resented the idea. "Not want Tom? Why ——"

"My dear, Tom is incomparable, of course. But women have odd tastes. In no other way can I account for your taking me."

"Please be serious, Henry. Suppose she does want him. What will you do about it?"

The smile faded from Mr. Cass' lips. "Take my advice, Mary, and sit tight. The boy's proven already that he's master of his own fate."

"He's a mere child!"

"Granted; but why all this alarm over his possible affection for — an extraordinarily charming young woman?"

"Do you mean to say that you could see him marry that girl without lifting a finger to prevent it?"

"On the contrary, my dear. If he is in love with her, and she with him, I shall so far restrain my instinctive conservatism as to confer my paternal blessing upon them." He puffed silently for a moment on his cigar. Then he added, with a dry chuckle: "I have learned to accept facts of record, my dear."

She was thoughtful. "Do you think she cares for — for himself alone?"

"I've told you that I don't know whether she cares for him at all."

"Of course you don't. But assuming that she does. Do you think there's an ulterior motive?"

He flicked the ash from his cigar. "Nine-tenths of a banker's business is judging character," he said slowly. "I — I think I should extend considerable credit to that young woman — without collateral."

"She may be a perfectly sweet girl, but we don't know anything of her origin or her people or ——"

"Does one marry either of those things?"

"You can be sarcastic if you like, Henry," said Mrs. Cass stiffly, "but one certainly does. Tom has been brought up to certain standards and ideals. He's become a part of a certain kind of society. If his wife is from an entirely different kind, then I'm quite sure ——"

Mr. Cass rose and stretched himself. "I think, my dear," he said with a yawn, "that you're crossing your bridges before you come to them. She may be hunting for bigger game than your darling baby."

CHAPTER X

THE days were winged, as pleasant days are. Toward the end of their stay, nearly every one grew conscious of the speed with which time flew, and sought to fill the last precious hours to overflowing.

It was late in the afternoon of the last day, and the entire party, even to the lethargic Miss Byram, was plodding homeward, after a long hike through the snow. It chanced that Tommy and Anne brought up the rear.

To the former it was an opportunity not to be lost. The straps of his snowshoes began to develop an astonishing amount of insecurity, and a quite unwonted interest in things along the trail possessed him. To put it mildly, he dawdled. Miss Manard found herself obliged to halt every few yards.

It was not, however, until the rest of the party had vanished even out of earshot that she began to suspect his motives.

"That's the fifth time that strap has come undone," she declared crossly.

He straightened up, grinning. "Good li'l' strap!" he murmured.

She grasped the situation then. "Tommy! You're outrageous! Do hurry!"

"Hurry nothing! I know the way home all right."

"Oh — what *will* they think?"

"A lot I care," said Tommy lightly. "It's what you think."

"Now, Tommy ——"

He took her by the arm. "Here's a dry log. Let's sit down a bit. I — I'm tired."

Irresolutely she suffered herself to yield to his bidding. "You're a very naughty boy!"

His eyes looked into hers, unsmiling. "It's been wonderful having you here. I — I wonder if you've liked it as much as I have?"

"Oh, indeed I have!" she declared warmly.

He frowned. "I don't mean just on general principles. I mean, have you liked my being here as much as I've liked your ——"

She turned her head away, interrupting: "Why, of course I have."

He seized her and swung her toward him almost roughly. "I fell in love with you, Anne, a long time ago. I didn't really know it, though, until Burroughs entered the game. And now — this week up here has made me know it better."

The question was suggested rather than uttered: "Why?"

"The other girls, mostly. I've been crazy about each one of 'em. Even thought I was engaged to Corinne once. They're crackin' fine girls, too. But, gee! Beside you they're — they're ——" He struggled for an adequate simile.

"Oh, Tommy, what nonsense! I'm not as good a sport as Nell, and I can't sing at all, and — and there aren't many girls as lovely as Corinne."

He nodded stubbornly. "I'll grant all that. But they — they're parasites. They just play. You're twice as attractive as any of them. But that isn't what gets me. The fact is, you count for something in the world. Why, Anne, do you know — you — you're the only girl I ever really *looked up to!*"

"What a sentimental boy you are!" She smiled at him a little wistfully.

"I tell you I'm practical," he answered firmly. Then he grinned with the boyishness which made for much of his charm. "Can't you see it, Anne? It's a cinch to find girls you can love. But when you find one you can respect, too ——"

"And you respect me after all I told you?"

"Poppycock!" he exclaimed. "I don't care what you used to think."

"Suppose I still think it?"

"You mean — you mean Burroughs?" His face hardened.

"I didn't say that. I said *suppose.*"

He dug into the snow with his staff. "I can't compete against him," he muttered presently. "Not on any reasonable grounds. He's better than I am, any way you look at it. But being in love isn't being reasonable. I—— Oh, shucks!" he burst out, in a changed voice. "I'm crazy about you, Anne, and that's all there is to it!"

She remained silent, gazing down steadfastly at her feet.

"Haven't I any chance?" he asked mournfully, when the pause had begun to seem interminable.

Still she was silent.

"Not just a little bit o' one?" he persisted.

Suddenly she faced him, and a rare smile flashed in her eyes. "Tommy," she said, her voice trembling, "you're the sweetest boy in all the world. But you're a perfectly clean slate. Put something on it!"

He scarcely knew what happened next. There was a sudden explosion in the furs at his side, and a momentary feeling of tender arms around him—and Anne was standing a yard away, suggesting rather breathlessly, that it was late.

Dazed, he rubbed his cheek. Unless he were quite insane, it still burned with the flashing print of hot lips.

He rose stiffly from the fallen log, like a man in a trance. Anne was already on the move. He could

see her lithe figure gliding away through the purpling shadows.

A profound sigh escaped him. Then his teeth clicked, and he set off in pursuit. "I'll do it!" he gritted through clenched jaws. "I'll fill it full!"

The others, already gathered around the fire, awaiting their arrival, greeted their elaborate and ingenious explanations with polite but thinly veiled incredulity. Mrs. Cass, whose emotions were those exclusively of alarm, studied the faces of the pair as they removed their wraps, and made a great ado assisting them, in a patent effort to create diversion.

Anne, with the feminine gift for histrionics, revealed nothing. Nor was Tommy's countenance much more illuminating. Mrs. Cass was profoundly puzzled. There were moments when her son's gloom was obvious, and her spirits rose. But again, as if in answer to some inward recollection, he became amazingly cheerful. And in between these two extremes of feeling appeared a singularly baffling grimness; if he chanced to speak while under its spell, his words were clipped off aggressively.

Mrs. Cass could make nothing definite of the situation. Of only one thing could she be sure: it was neither wholly hopeless nor wholly reassuring. Her first dismal certainties were succeeded by doubt,

and she was soon convinced that the last state was worse than the first.

No doubts troubled the others. In the first place, the situation was commonplace, and in this instance not unexpected. And in the second, it was quite delightful, as true love always is to the young, not yet comprehending the manifold complexities which maturity discerns in that deceptively simple state. Furthermore, several of them were occupied with not dissimilar concerns of their own — and it was the last night.

Dinner was spontaneous and riotously gay. When Edith Byram sang, it was in glittering arabesques, and the strings of the piano throbbed with laughter. Only once did wistfulness sound in her voice, and one might have observed that her eyes were on Mr. Aishton.

Despite the necessity for early rising on the morrow, and trunks yet unpacked, it was nearly midnight before the old phonograph was allowed to cease its rasping accompaniment to tireless feet.

There was much cheerful laughter, and not a little melancholy, resolutely suppressed, as they bade one another good night.

Mr. Cass, standing aloof in one corner, held the hand which Anne extended to him. "Might I have a chat with you when the others have gone?" he asked quietly.

A shrewd smile played under his mustache at her start of surprise, and he turned to some one else without awaiting her reply.

Mrs. Cass, always diligent in her duty, tarried for the departure of the last guest, bravely fighting off the yawns which assailed her. For a moment the situation looked difficult, and Anne felt herself reddening. But Mr. Cass was quite master of it. His eyes flashed a signal to his wife, and in a moment he and Anne were left alone.

He went to the fireplace and stirred the embers into a glow. "Won't you sit down?" he suggested, selecting a cigar from the box at his elbow.

She took the chair he indicated, and waited, striving to fortify herself against the painful interview she knew was coming.

"I want to talk to you about my son," he began, watching the smoke rings form.

"Yes?" Her voice sounded very far away and husky.

"I feel, Miss Manard, that I know you rather better than either he or you suspect."

She moistened her dry lips, nodding. It was curious how extraordinarily young and helpless this calm old man made her feel. Worse — she almost felt guilty!

"Tom is not aware of it, but his letters have been largely about you." Mr. Cass chuckled reflectively.

"It has been a privilege to know him." Anne realized that the words were wretchedly stiff, but they were all she could bring herself to utter.

"It is perhaps more of a privilege than you realize," he went on quietly. "It is a very solemn privilege, I think, to be the star by which impressionable youth guides itself. Tommy idealizes you, Miss Manard."

She felt placed on the defensive. "Is that my fault, Mr. Cass?"

He exhibited surprise. "Your fault? Certainly not."

"Then why do you tell me this?" She was resolved to bring the encounter to a head.

He considered for a moment, biting his lip. "I am his father, Miss Manard. It is my duty to help him in so far as may be."

"Of course. But——"

"I am asking your aid—your very important aid."

"I'm only too ready to give it," she burst out honestly, "but I——"

It suddenly flashed upon him that she misunderstood. An enigmatic smile twinkled under the heavy white brows. He laid a kindly hand on her shoulder. "Let me make myself clear, Miss Manard. Tommy has not written exclusively of you. Significant words have appeared. I sense new ideas

growing in him — dangerous, perhaps. He is developing rapidly."

She nodded agreement, and a faint smile curved her lips.

"Has it occurred to you that his development might run counter to the wishes of others? He is willful, you know. I feel a certain anxiety — perhaps because I know his heritage. The lad comes by his willfulness naturally."

"I see," she murmured, a light beginning to dawn.

"From what he has told me, and from what I have judged for myself, you are an extraordinary young woman. You have a level head on your shoulders. Is it too much to ask that you use your wit and your experience to steady my boy?"

A sigh of relief escaped her. "Oh — is that all?" she said impulsively, but under her breath. And aloud: "He's had a great flood of new impressions — perhaps he hasn't understood — not fairly. But he *feels*, Mr. Cass. He goes to the heart of things! Not reasonably, but like a poet."

The old man nodded. "Youth is quick and intolerant. I'm not afraid of his conclusions. He will see the world differently from me, of course; that is inevitable. I shall not worry about that. If he sees it honestly, I shall be content. No, Miss Manard, it is not where he is going that troubles

me. I cannot halt the spirit of the time which is in him, even if I would. And even if you could do it, I would not have you. All I ask is that he strike a working balance between his ideals and the terms of the game of life. I would have him aim high, but with his feet on the ground."

The old man's quiet intensity made her feel curiously ineffectual. She could only nod in silent acquiescence.

"You will do as I ask, Miss Manard? You will try to guide him?"

"Indeed I shall, Mr. Cass. Though I'm not very wise myself."

He ignored her deprecation. "And will you do this — will you keep me acquainted with his doings? The boy is strangely proud. I fear that in the time of need I should be the last person he'd call upon. I would not have it so, Miss Manard; I would be the first. Do you understand?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I think I do."

He held out his hand, and the shrewd old eyes gazed into hers. "Will you promise?"

"Promise?" she repeated, striving to get hold of herself before the onslaught, the meaning of which was suddenly unmistakable.

"Yes; that whatever befalls my boy of good or ill, you will tell me *first*."

"Have you the right to ask me that?" she fal-

tered, coloring deeply.

"I am very fond of him," he answered gently.

Stirred by a sudden impulse, she leaned over and kissed the old man lightly on the forehead. "Don't be afraid, dear Mr. Cass," she whispered, and there was passionate earnestness in her voice. "He has no better friend on earth than I!"

Then she fled. She knew that if she tarried a moment she would break down utterly.

CHAPTER XI

TOMMY returned to work to find the factory humming with unprecedented activity. While half the world was busily engaged in the task of mutual extermination, the other half was reaping the harvest. Never had the country known such unexampled prosperity, and the Champion Paint and Varnish Company was getting its full share.

The old bottles had begun to crack under the immense pressure of the new wine. Tommy's eyes were greeted by two imposing new factories, already up to the second story. All day the air vibrated with the constant pound of hammers, the intermittent rattle of pneumatic riveters.

He found changes in the atmosphere of the plant inside, as well as those more material out of doors. Business was developing faster than man could be secured to handle it. Labor had become the most precious of all raw materials. And it was plain labor knew it. Men no longer labored in ever-present fear of discharge. Some, conscious of the change, experienced a just pride in their value and gained in dignity; others, according to their quality, wavered on the verge of insolence. Rumors of dis-

affection and threats of strikes were forever in the air, like a choking dust.

Tommy made the acquaintance of and grew rather intimate with a young man named Keller, a superintendent of construction on the new buildings. With him he often discussed the new order of things.

The engineer felt it too. "The bit's in their teeth," he declared. "Capital had better watch out, or they'll be running away with the whole shebang!"

More than once he was its victim specifically. "Oh, damn them!" he would bark in exasperation. "Time was when I fired a man for sloppy work. Now I apologize for even suggesting that I want anything else!"

Sometimes, when hard pressed, he would pour anecdotes, grimly ironic, into Tommy's sympathetic ear. "They used to be afraid of me, Cass. Now if they feel like bawling me out I—I—why, bless your heart, I kiss their hands!"

But the thing which most of all drew Tommy to Keller was a kind of obstinate fairness, a sublime sense of humor which nothing could quite conquer. He voiced it forcibly one afternoon in early spring. Tommy met him as he crossed the yard on his way home.

"Bound for dinner and the easy chair, eh?"

rasped the engineer, lighting a cigarette.

"Yes. Isn't it about time you were quitting yourself?"

Keller laughed dryly. "I'm not quitting at all tonight."

"What's the answer?"

Keller flung his hand toward a group of workmen just piling on the waiting street car. "Those fellows quit when the whistle blows," he growled. "They're union men. But I'm only a bachelor of arts and a C. E. *I* do what I'm told. I'm staying on the job tonight because I don't dare to do anything else."

One cannot help respecting power. Tommy voiced his enthusiasm. "It's wonderful what those fellows have done, isn't it? They'll rule the world some day."

The engineer grunted. "They'd rule it now if they only knew their own strength. They call themselves unions, but they're not united. They're always fighting among themselves."

Tommy's first experience of business recurred to him. "But isn't that Capital's fault?" he asked. "Doesn't it do a lot to keep labor divided?"

Keller looked surprised. "Of course it does! And why not? But it's getting harder every day. Why, I wish you could have heard the laugh those wops gave me when I politely suggested that they

stay with me tonight." He sighed ruefully. "By thunder, I wish I belonged to a union!"

Tommy was serious about it, and persistent. "It complicates business, maybe. But somehow I — I can't help thinking it'll work out better in the end."

Keller smiled tolerantly. "How so?"

"Well, everything labor has it's gotten by fighting for it. There's not much been given gratis. As individuals they haven't a chance. Look at the poor devils of clerks in stores. Taken by themselves, they're slaves, that's what they are. And they'll be treated like slaves, too. But when slaves organize — well, they're something else, aren't they?"

"You bet they are. They — they're *czars!*"

Tommy's eyes, afire with enthusiasm, strayed off over the fast-shadowing rooftops. "The idea gets me," he cried. "It — it's like an army. Take those fellows alone, and they're rather pitiful — so ignorant and helpless. But put 'em together, and — why, it — it's magnificent. For the life of me I can't see how any sane person can object to unionism."

The engineer grinned. "You spout like a soapbox orator, Cass. Of course it's all right in theory. It's only when you bang your head into it — the way I am tonight — that you lose your taste for it. It isn't so darned inspiring then!"

"But you're *not* losing your taste for it!" cried

Tommy. "You just said so yourself. You want more unionism — not less. You're mad simply because you don't belong to a union yourself."

The engineer nodded sagely. "I guess that's it. By thunder, I'd like to be able to tell my bosses where to get off!"

"We're just the miserable white-collar class!" said Tommy, with sudden contempt for himself.

As Tommy left the factory he encountered Mr. Burroughs, belated and just getting into his roadster.

"Hop in," said the latter. "I'll take you home."

It soon became evident that Mr. Burroughs felt expansive and conversational. "What in the world were you and Keller talking about? I could see you from my window, waving your arms like a couple of wild men."

Tommy answered first with an explanation of the engineer's predicament. Burroughs chuckled appreciatively. But as the rest of the conversation unfolded itself the smile left his face.

He was silent for a block or two. Then he shifted the cigar in his teeth. "You're getting hipped on that subject, Cass."

Tommy sought to argue, but the older man cut him short. "You've got a lot to learn, my boy."

Again Tommy tried to insert a word of extenuation, but with no better success. Mr. Burroughs

appeared to feel that the subject had been disposed of.

When the car rolled up to the curb in front of his boarding house, Tommy got out quickly, expressing his thanks for the kindness. Mr. Burroughs waved his words aside. Then, as if in afterthought, he said: "Be in my office at ten tomorrow, will you?"

With a sudden clash of gears, the machine disappeared in the dusk.

At the appointed time next morning Tommy opened the door of the president's private office.

"Morning!" grunted Mr. Burroughs, without looking up from the roll of blue prints he was studying. "Got a little postgraduate course in human nature for you."

He said no more, and Tommy was left to digest this cryptic observation as best he might. It was not many minutes, however, before there was a knock on the door, and the office boy entered, bearing a card.

Mr. Burroughs gave it a hasty glance. "Show him in," he said, in a curiously flat voice.

The visitor proved to be a stocky little man, with black, oily hair plastered above a round and very red face. His eyes were small and snapping, like jet pins stuck in an apple.

He was affability itself. "Mornin', Mr. Burroughs!"

A cold invitation to be seated was the only reply. Then the wondering Tommy was enlightened to the extent of a curt introduction: "Cass, this is Mr. Slattery."

The newcomer extended a spongy hand and said: "Pleased t' meetcha!" rather absently, Tommy thought. Then he addressed Mr. Burroughs, not quite as affably as before: "I thought this was between you an' me?"

Burroughs' lip curled ever so slightly. "Mr. Cass is my assistant. It is quite safe, I assure you."

Mr. Slattery shrugged his shoulders. "Suit yerself," he grunted, throwing one fat leg over the other and licking the disintegrating leaves of his cigar. "Well, what was it ye was wantin' to see me about?"

Tommy could almost imagine that sparks flashed from Mr. Burroughs' flinty eyes. The latter leaned forward, his elbows resting on the desk. "I received a letter from your office concerning the electrical work on our new buildings."

"Oh, that!" Mr. Slattery leaned back, his thumbs in his vest, smiling benignly. "Sure! Ye see, the fixtures that's been put in was made by a scab shop."

Suppressed wrath trembled in Mr. Burroughs' voice. "You knew that when you put them in."

Mr. Slattery grinned. "Aw, don't say that, Mr.

Burroughs. I wouldn't do sich a thing!"

"It was a deplorable — er — *accident,* I suppose?"

"Sure it was." Mr. Slattery's unpleasant grin broadened. "It was an accident. Somebody should 'a' told you."

"You're a liar," said Mr. Burroughs evenly. "You let those fixtures go in deliberately, just so you could hold us up afterward."

Mr. Slattery shrugged his shoulders again. "Have it yer own way. But you knew as well as I do that a union man ain't allowed to hang scab fixtures."

"Well, they're in."

"Yep, they're in!"

"What are you going to do about it?"

Mr. Slattery gave up the attempt at salvage on his cigar and extracted a fresh one from his pocket. "That's a foolish question, Mr. Burroughs. You know the answer yerself."

"If the fixtures stay, you call out the men?"

"Exactly."

"In other words, I've got to rip out all that stuff, junk it, get new, and rehang it?"

Mr. Slattery held up a deprecating hand. "I don' *want* to, Mr. Burroughs. I *gotta!* That's the rules of the organization, ye know."

"Why?" As the president put the question,

Tommy was conscious of a quick glance sidelong at himself.

"Because we gotta hold up union principles. We gotta fight scab labor all the time. A good union man's gotta see that the union label's in everything he wears or uses——"

"In everything *other* people use, too!"

"Sure. That's reasonable, ain't it?"

Mr. Burroughs smiled frostily. "Oh, absolutely reasonable. You've got to keep the standard up."

"That's it 'xactly."

"Um! But don't you think—— Isn't putting me to all that trouble and—and waste just a little—er—unfair?"

"There's the principle, Mr. Burroughs."

"Of course. But isn't there some way of—ah—getting around the principle?"

Mr. Slattery rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I don't know about that."

Mr. Burroughs' lip twisted shrewdly. "The men—the rank and file—don't know about these fixtures, do they?"

A flash of appreciative humor lighted Mr. Slattery's porcine eyes. Then he became very judicious. "It wouldn't be right for me to say, Mr. Burroughs."

"No, I suppose not."

"You understan' how it would be——"

"Oh, yes, of course. I was merely trying to estimate how much this accident has cost these good men."

"Cost?" Mr. Slattery exhibited bewilderment.

"I mean," went on Mr. Burroughs smoothly, "if we tear out those fixtures and rehang them, it will mean twice as much work. Now, at eighty cents an hour——"

"Eighty-five," corrected Mr. Slattery, beginning to perceive the drift of the conversation.

"All right. Well, what does it come to?"

"Five hundred dollars," said Mr. Slattery promptly.

"That would soothe all injured feelings and uphold the glorious principles of unionism, would it?"

Mr. Slattery appreciated humor, even when it was bitterly sarcastic humor. He feigned to be grieved. "Oh, not the principle, Mr. Burroughs. Not that. But we're fair. We don't want to hold up the buildin' on a technicality. If you'll just——"

"We understand each other, Slattery," said Mr. Burroughs abruptly. "Kindly make out a receipt."

Again Tommy was conscious that the president was watching him.

Mr. Slattery knocked the ash from his cigar. "You won't need a receipt, ol' man," he said softly.

Mr. Burroughs' expression conveyed nothing. "I suppose not. A check will do as well."

Mr. Slattery's eyes became pinholes. "We don't care for checks, if it's just the same to you."

"Why not?" Mr. Burroughs' simulation of astonishment was perfect enough to deceive Tommy.

Not so Mr. Slattery. His thick lower lip protruded and his voice was harsh: "'Cause I don't like 'em — see?"

Mr. Burroughs shrugged his shoulders. "Each to his taste." With a quick movement, he pulled out a drawer of his desk and tossed a roll of bills across the plate-glass surface. "Count 'em," he said briefly.

Mr. Slattery, shifting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other and blinking his eyes against the smoke, leaned forward for the money. Very deliberately his pudgy thumb counted off the crisply crackling bills.

"Correct," he said finally, and held out his hand.

For an instant Mr. Burroughs hesitated. Then his black frown dissolved in an uncontrollable smile, and he accepted the extended hand.

"You're the cheerfulest scamp I ever met!" he exclaimed feelingly.

One of Mr. Slattery's little eyes fluttered significantly. "The boys'll sure appreciate this," he said smoothly, thrusting the roll of bills into an inside pocket. Then he remembered Tommy. "Goo'-by, Mr. Cass. Glad to have metcha."

Tommy merely nodded, his mouth open.

Mr. Burroughs waited until the door closed. Then he leaned back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head. "Well, what do you think of it?" He smiled sardonically as he put the question.

Wrath flared up in Tommy uncontrollably. "Gosh! Why didn't you give him a ride on your boot?"

"Because, my dear boy, that pleasure would prove altogether too expensive."

Tommy gritted his teeth. "It—it's an outrage!"

"Of course. But what are you going to do about it?"

"I—I'd fight 'em to a finish! I'd be hanged if I'd stand for such blackmail!"

"That's theory, my lad. Practically you'd find it cheaper to pay the graft than to fight. As a matter of fact, it's figured into the cost of the building before we start. It's perfectly well understood."

"You mean it—it's common?"

"It's universal," said Mr. Burroughs bluntly. "I had you in here for a purpose, Cass. Perhaps you see now why practical men find it hard to enthuse about trade unions?"

Tommy ran his fingers through his hair. "But the principle's all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, nothing against *that*. Confine your enthusiasm to principles, and there'll be no trouble."

Tommy struggled for an analogy, which seemed always to elude him. Suddenly he found it. "Isn't it just like government? The city's run by grafters and crooks. But that isn't the fault of democracy. It's the fault of the people who — who don't appreciate what democracy is. Those bills you gave Slattery — the men'll never see them, will they?"

"Don't make me laugh!"

"Well, some day they'll wake up. They'll throw the grafters out. They'll ——"

Mr. Burroughs shook his head. "I doubt it, Cass. They're a lot of sheep. And, besides, you mustn't forget this: Even if leeches like Slattery line their pockets privately, they usually boost wages, too."

"Don't the men care *how* wages are boosted?"

"Not a bit. No more than we care if our city officials give us well-paved streets, good car service, and a reasonable degree of personal comfort, how much of a good thing they make out of it privately."

Tommy sighed. "I'd hate to believe that."

Mr. Burroughs leaned across the desk, emphasizing his words with sharp thrusts of his finger. "I'm a few years older than you are, Cass. For that reason, I'm going to preach at you. You've finished the undergraduate part of life. You've been sizing things up long enough. Now you've got to make

decisions. Like every healthy, normal young man, you stand between two roads. If you take the one of sentiment and decide to be a poet, I'll not quarrel with you; but your usefulness in the paint business will be at an end. I think it's about time you were throwing in your vote for the practical, in more ways than one."

The words were precise and unmistakable, but Tommy was unpleasantly conscious that they carried a double significance.

"Think it over, Cass," finished Mr. Burroughs abruptly, turning to his work.

Tommy rose. Twice his lips opened and closed silently. Then he said: "I'll try to do the right thing." He spoke quite respectfully and with such obvious ingenuousness that any suspicion of cant was unthinkable.

But as the eyes of the two met they were like the poles of a high-potential current. The atmosphere fairly tingled with challenge.

CHAPTER XII

THE disillusionment of that encounter with Mr. Burroughs threw Tommy back upon himself, and at the first opportunity he paid a delayed visit upon the all but forgotten Frembach.

He went out to the chemist's house on Sunday afternoon. The old man was in his laboratory, but, contrary to precedent and expectation, he was not working. Seated in an old rocking-chair, his slippered feet propped up on the window sill, he was puffing meditatively his corncob.

"Well, how goes it?" was Tommy's cheerful introduction.

The chemist looked up, scowling. "I suppose you think it's 'bout time I was producing something?"

Tommy hastened to reassure him: "You've got all the time in the world, you know."

The old man shook his head. "I'm going to quit."

"*Quit?* Why, what in the——"

"I've found an eosin violet that's as stable as the color of quartz but who the dickens wants an eosin violet—just now?" He laughed harshly.

"But you're not sure of that," urged Tommy. "Why not——"

The chemist interrupted him: "I've been wasting my time. Spending your money, and nothing to show for it."

"Nonsense! You've worked your head off."

"It's the war. I—I can't think of anything else. I dream about it nights. Making colors for women's dresses seems so—so—— Ugh, it makes me ashamed!"

Tommy was bewildered. This was a novel phase for Frembach. He did not know what to say.

The chemist's feet came down from the window with a crash, and he clenched his fists passionately. "This is no time for dyes!" he cried. "The world wants guns and ships and soldiers. Death—not vanity!"

"But——"

"Don't try to argue with me, boy! I'm as mad as any dog in bedlam! I tell you, I've thought of nothing else. I'm sick. I'm disgusted with myself. Better men than I are giving their lives to destroy the evil spirit abroad in the world, and I putter with pretty colors. Faugh!"

Tommy was aghast. "But *we* aren't at war!" he exclaimed, literal as always.

The old man leaped to his feet, beating the air. "We should be," he bellowed, the reverberations of

his deep voice crashing against the walls of the little laboratory. "That's what sickens me. The poor devils abroad are fighting our battles, and we lie awake nights scheming to make money out of it. I'm too old to carry a rifle. The only thing I have is a brain, and I'm using that to make some fat hog of an American rich!"

"You needn't talk about America like that," said Tommy stiffly.

"And why not? I'm an American myself. I've been one longer than you have. I—I'm ashamed of it! Smug chatter about neutrality—and dyes. Good Lord!"

Tommy was never subtle. "Well, what do you want to do about it?" he demanded practically.

The chemist ignored the question. "I'm ashamed of my country," he said, more quietly. "I'm ashamed of myself. I've spent your money, and nothing to show for it. I—I haven't been fair to you."

It occurred to Tommy that Frembach was embarrassed. The old man's feverish words seemed to conceal, and yet to suggest, something quite definite. Characteristically he plunged. And, as so often happened, his own lack of finesse evoked candor in his companion.

"You're keeping something from me," he said bluntly.

Frembach started. "Why, how did you know?"

"What is it?"

The old man sighed. "I—I couldn't help it. The war——"

"You've found something?"

Frembach nodded, his wrinkled old face oddly contorted. "It came about naturally, in a way. I—I didn't start out deliberately. Really I didn't." A sudden defiance flashed in his eyes. "But I'm not sorry!"

"Sorry for what?"

The old man averted his gaze. "Sit down, Mr. Cass," he murmured. "I'll tell you the whole story. I—I've been meaning to for some time."

"I wish you would!" exclaimed Tommy fervently.

Frembach hesitated. "You understand, it—it was an accident, in a way."

"Go ahead. Spill it."

"Well, chemistry is like the trunk of a tree. It all starts from the same seed. But the branches split off in different directions—tremendously different. Sometimes they shoot off before one's quite realized what's happened."

Tommy grinned. "I know. I monkeyed with chemistry in college myself. It did queer things sometimes."

Frembach went on professorily: "Modern syn-

thetic dyes originate in coal tar. That's the seed. Out of it grow benzol, xylol, toluol — things like that. They're the big branches. Then off of them sprout smaller branches — eosin violet, all sorts of bright, harmless, pleasing colors."

The quality of the chemist's voice held Tommy gripped in fascination. The old man's singular earnestness was impressive.

"But there are other branches," he continued, "not — not so harmless. Oh, I shouldn't have played with them, boy, I know I shouldn't, but I did! Toluol——"

"Sounds like a chewing gum!" laughed Tommy, instinctively anxious to relieve the curious tension.

But the old chemist was not to be diverted. "Glycerin's a harmless thing. And old Mother Earth. Even nitric acid has few terrors. But put 'em together — dynamite's not harmless!" He was silent for a moment, gnawing at his mustache. "The man who discovered that made millions out of it. You know what he did with them?"

"No."

"He left them to — to found a Peace Prize. His name was Nobel. Blood money, if ever there was!"

The old man lost himself in reflection. Then, heaving a profound sigh, he went on: "Toluol sounds to you like a confection. Well, sometimes

it's even more harmless than that. It's in the clothes we wear. And then, again—— Look here!" With a quick movement, he pulled out a drawer at his elbow and gave Tommy a handful of some granulated substance dull amber in color, semitranslucent, greasy to the touch. "There's toluol in this—and other things—*enough to blow up this building!*"

Tommy fingered the yellow flakes gingerly. He began to feel that he was actually closeted with a lunatic. His lips were unaccountably dry. "It—it's very pretty," he said, merely because he had to say something.

Frembach smiled at his expression. "You needn't be alarmed. That stuff's as safe as lemon candy. See, there's nothing to be afraid of!" He whipped a match from his pocket, and, pouring the yellow powder onto the table, ignited it. It burned brightly, with thick, creamy smoke.

"Wh—what are you going to do with it?" whispered Tommy, in an awed voice.

The chemist did not answer directly. "You see, it's slower burning than cordite," he declared, his professional enthusiasm asserting itself. "And it gives off its gases at a lower temperature. That saves the rifling of the guns."

For the first time, Tommy realized that the little laboratory was quite cluttered with firearms of all sorts. Frembach followed his wondering gaze.

"That's part of the 'miscellaneous' in my expense account," he said apologetically.

Tommy reverted to his first question. He was essentially concrete: "What are you going to do with it?"

The old chemist scratched his head. "It's better than anything they've got now; I'm certain of that. But——"

Tommy was emerging rapidly from his first coma of amazement. "If it is," he declared firmly, "Uncle Samuel ought to have it."

Frembach sneered: "*He's* too busy making money. He won't be interested."

Tommy shook his head. He was still young enough to cherish patriotic illusions. "I don't believe it. Anyhow, we've got to give him the chance."

The old man looked dubious. "I had thought of offering it to the French government. They're quick to adopt new things. Turpinite is a French discovery, you know."

"Not yet," said Tommy vigorously. "We'll try the U. S. A. first."

Frembach shrugged his shoulders. "It's your property, of course. I'll do whatever you say."

"It isn't my property. If it's any good, the credit's all yours.

"No, it's yours. You put up the money that——"

Tommy waved the argument aside. "You come down to the office to-morrow and we'll put it up to Burroughs. He'll know what to do."

"Burroughs?" Frembach looked blank and a little mistrustful.

"Sure. You're the inventor an' I'm the capitalist, if you want to put it that way. But old Burroughs is the lad to make things hum. If there's anything in this stuff, he'll get it out, all right, all right!"

The chemist sighed. "I've done all I can. Maybe you're right."

A question suddenly occurred to Tommy. "Say," he demanded, "how long have you known about this?"

Frembach thought a moment. "About a month."

"A month! Why — why didn't you tell me?"

The old man lowered his faded eyes. "I — I was ashamed," he muttered.

Tommy slapped his thigh in utter astonishment. "Well, by the —— Darned if you aren't a *nut!* Ashamed? You certainly do need a manager!"

Frembach nodded. "I — I guess that's so."

Mr. Burroughs' cool gray eyes widened as he listened to the narrative of Frembach's discovery. His amazement would have been infinitely greater had he known all the circumstances preceding it. The

fact was that Tommy was unwontedly disingenuous. He had planned for this interview with extreme care. To take Mr. Burroughs completely into his confidence would entail, he realized, more revelation than he cared to make. Any statement of the chemist's original plans would require an explanation — and the explanation would mean a confession of his own and his family's circumstances. This confession he was still reluctant to make. So he merely glozed over preliminaries and went straight to the heart of the matter.

His story was perhaps more enthusiastic than technically accurate, and when he paused for breath Mr. Burroughs, by an almost imperceptible gesture, signified his desire to have the chemist's version.

Frembach obeyed with alacrity. His words, emphasized by passionate thrusts of his long arms, poured forth in a ready flood. Interspersed with only vaguely intelligible scientific jargon, and at times beclouded by interjection of the moral issues which to him were so profoundly involved, he nevertheless succeeded in filling the gaps which Tommy's ignorance had left, and in giving a fairly complete account of the situation as it stood. When he had finished, Mr. Burroughs rose to pace thoughtfully to and fro behind his desk.

"H'm!" he ejaculated at last. "And what am I expected to do in this business?"

"That's for you to say," supplied Tommy promptly. "We came to you 'cause you know and we don't."

Mr. Burroughs was silent momentarily. "I suppose the first thing is to get it patented. Then submit it to the government. And then——" He halted abruptly, biting his lips. "Assuming that you've really found something, Frembach, it'll prove a lucky thing for you that you left us when you did."

The chemist showed his astonishment. "Why?"

"Because if you had invented this stuff while in our employ, the rights to it would be ours. As it is—well, you may get rich."

Tommy's heart leaped. "You mean you—you'll take it up?"

Mr. Burroughs answered without emotion, but his eyes glittered: "If we get any encouragement from Washington, we—— Yes, we might go into the gunpowder business."

"Holy smoke! Paint to dynamite—some jump!"

"Not so far chemically," said Frembach literally.

Mr. Burroughs smiled and pressed the button which summoned his secretary. "Without being dogmatic, Cass," he said, as calmly as if he were stating the simplest of axioms, "I should say that the whole philosophy of business was to make any-

thing you can sell at a profit. If we can make this — this — what do you call the stuff, Frembach?"

"Nitrotrinet."

"Oh, heavens!" interrupted Burroughs, with a laugh. "I couldn't remember that, anyway. How about calling it — well, *Frembalite?*"

"Frembalite!" echoed the old chemist softly, almost reverently, as if he were seeing a vision. His great hands suddenly went to his face, and his head dropped on his breast.

Tommy lost no time in dreams. "Who'll take care of the patenting?" he inquired practically.

"Can you write up the details, Frembach?" asked Mr. Burroughs.

With a sigh, the old man came out of his reverie and joined the others in discussion of the immediate details of the problem.

It was decided, at the conference, to leave the minutiae of litigation, and the negotiations with the government, in the capable and experienced hands of Mr. Burroughs. Tommy, who had a fortnight before been transferred from the factory to the office, resumed his rather tedious task of becoming familiar with the arcana of accounting, and, his work being both novel and exacting, presently found himself becoming all but indifferent to the fate of Frembalite.

Months rolled away without developments, the only news being a discouraging report from their representative in Washington on the attitude of certain congressmen whose views had been canvassed. It was the conviction of these gentlemen, apparently, that the powder used in the United States army and navy was superior to anything yet discovered, or to be discovered. And, furthermore, if one insisted on getting to the bottom of it, that it was really a matter of small consequence, anyway, whether the guns of the commonwealth fired good powder or bad. In fact, morally all powder was bad.

Tommy, not familiar with the ratiocinative processes of congressmen in general, and pacifists in particular, was tremendously depressed. Being a person of perfectly literal mind, he was entirely unable to see why the chairman of a committee on military affairs should consider military affairs as something rather beneath a Christian and a gentleman. He was so simple-minded that it actually made him angry. But Mr. Burroughs merely smiled.

"Wait," he counseled. "We'll try the front door first, as a matter of form and courtesy. If they won't open it, we'll try the back."

More months rolled away, without news, discouraging or otherwise. And then one bright morning Mr. Burroughs called Tommy into his private office. It was a matter of pride with the president of the

Champion Paint and Varnish Company to maintain always an impassive exterior. But on this occasion it was plain to see that he labored under a pressure of excitement almost uncontrollable.

"I — I've just heard from Washington," he said, in a voice which shook despite his evident efforts to manage it.

Tommy's heart sank. "Another turndown?"

"The thing's been in the hands of the navy," went on Mr. Burroughs, ignoring the question. "They've given it a thorough trial in big guns and little. I have here an order for ten thousand pounds of Frembalite. And an assurance that they will take all we can make, if it continues to measure up to the trials." His fist came down on the desk with a crash that made the inkwell jump, and his excitement was no longer concealed. "It's a go, Tommy, my boy — *it's a go!*"

Tommy could only gasp: "And the patent?"

"It's not allowed yet, but I've got the word of the best firm in the country that it most certainly will be. But the name's registered. Old Frembach's got his place in history, all right."

"I'll go tell him!" cried Tommy.

Mr. Burroughs had one of his rare moments of expansiveness. "Tell him his job's waiting for him, and any kind of a laboratory he wants, with assistants by the barrel!"

Tommy was already in the hall, whistling at the top of his lungs.

More news of the navy tests came through presently to delight the hearts of all concerned in Frembalite. It appeared that not only had all their hopes been justified and all the claims of the inventor substantiated, but that new and altogether unsuspected virtues had been discovered in the greasy, yellow pellets of destruction. "It was as far superior to cordite," wrote one gunnery expert of high degree, "as black powder was to a sling shot." This, of course, was hyperbole, but it was gratifying, none the less.

It was very quickly evident, however, that pleasant as contemplation was upon the success already achieved, it advanced matters practically not at all. There was elaborate apparatus of one kind or another to be secured, materials to be purchased, skilled assistance to be hired, complicated machinery to be designed, manufactured, and installed, and finally factory facilities to be acquired. The days were full of toil for everybody, and, more frequently than not, a goodly portion of the nights, too.

At first the operations connected with the manufacture of Frembalite were kept shrouded in mystery. But secrets are short-lived when many share them. So it was not long before every one, from office help to doorkeeper, had fairly accurate in-

formation as to the new course upon which the Champion Paint and Varnish Company had embarked.

When it was manifest that the secret was one no longer, Tommy unleashed his tongue and talked frankly to his erstwhile companions of the factory about it. Bubbling over with enthusiasm as he was himself, he expected that they would of course be enthusiastic, too. In consequence he was sorely perplexed by their reception of the news. And then, as he was brought to realize the truth, he was hurt and a little angry.

He tried, though unsuccessfully, to evade the idea. But the apathy of nine out of ten of the men was all too apparent. They were neither pessimistic about the new venture, nor hostile; they simply did not care. They talked about it, to be sure, and for a time did a little welcome boasting outside. But when the novelty had vanished, and the new machinery was in operation, and every one had paid a visit to the new factories, hastily thrown up in the safety of the prairie to the west, they went back to indifference.

Tommy struggled bravely to arouse in them an appreciation of all that Frembalite meant. But they merely turned their heads away and went on debating the relative merits of the Sox and the Cubs. And finally the dreadful truth dawned upon him

that Frembalite really meant nothing whatever to them. The corollary was inevitable; the company itself meant nothing to them.

That certainty struck him with the force of a blow, and sickened him for days. But he was young and temperamentally optimistic; and, above all, he was enormously busy with concrete and immediate affairs. He had little time for spiritual complications.

Then one day, when things had just begun to run smoothly and Frembalite was pouring out from the machines with the precision and volume of ordinary paint or varnish, the vaulting edifice of material achievement collapsed about his startled ears and he was forced, whether he would or no, to envisage a new and altogether dreadful world.

The summons came from Mr. Burroughs, borne by Reddie Monaghan, the diminutive office Mercury. "An', gee!" added the latter, his eyes popping. "The old man's awful mad 'bout somethin'!"

Tommy found the diagnosis all too accurate. Mr. Burroughs, all thought of impassiveness thrown to the winds, was pacing his office like an angry bear. "The swine!" he growled savagely through tight-clamped jaws. "The contemptible——"

"You wished to see me?" broke in Tommy hesitantly.

"Yes. D'you know what's happened?"

"Why — no, sir."

"We're held up; that's what. We're stood against a wall and our pockets emptied by the ——"

"I — I don't understand."

For the first time in their association, Tommy heard Mr. Burroughs curse — sulphurously. "They've just left me. They ——"

"Who have?"

"As fine a gang of thieving pirates as ever flew the jolly roger!" Another stream of savage oaths poured from the president's lips. Never, thought Tommy, had he seen a man more thoroughly angry. Fascinated, he stared at the pulsing nostrils, and watched the spot of color come and go on the white cheeks.

"Who has been here?" he ventured timidly.

Mr. Burroughs' tense features relaxed a trifle and he laughed, though quite mirthlessly. "A delegation from the freight huskies. They demand a ten-per-cent increase in pay — they got a voluntary increase not three months ago, mind you, and half an hour off their working time."

Tommy was appalled. "Not — not Dolan's crowd?"

Mr. Burroughs bared his teeth in a vitriolic sneer. "Dolan was one of them."

"No!"

"Yes, and talkative. He — he smelled like a barroom, damn him!"

"No!" repeated Tommy weakly. He felt sick at heart.

Mr. Burroughs resumed his nervous pacing of the floor. "I told them what I thought of them. I — I told them to go to the devil!"

"You — you refused their demands?"

"Naturally. And I did more than that. I told 'em they were fired — every mother's son of them."

"What did they say?"

Mr. Burroughs halted, his fingers twitching. His lips moved dryly for a moment before any words came from them. When he finally spoke, it was in a voice which shook with passion: "They laughed at me, Cass! By gad, they laughed! I didn't dare fire them, they said. I didn't dare! And if I didn't meet their demands, they'd quit. They gave me twenty-four hours to decide."

"What can you do?"

"Do? The dogs are right — I don't dare to fire them. And, what's more, they very kindly informed me that if they quit the rest of the plant would go out, too!"

"No!" Tommy was monosyllabic in his astonishment. His feelings were too profound for expression.

"How do you like your precious laboring man,

the honest, sweating toiler, now?" sneered Mr. Burroughs, with a malevolence not at all repressed. "They think we're making a big thing out of this powder proposition, so they're going to join us in the melon."

Tommy thought a moment. "In a way, that's fair — don't you think?" he suggested diffidently. "I mean ——"

"*Fair!*" roared Burroughs, in utter exasperation. "What an imbecilic question! Of course it isn't fair! Why, great guns, man, do you ——"

"But oughtn't labor to share — more or less — in unusual profits?"

Burroughs' lip curled. "Then labor ought to share in unusual risks — and unusual losses. This powder business may blow the company into a receivership before we're through. Personally I'm risking my reputation, my job — a whole lot of money. Yet you want these fellows to get everything without risking anything!"

"I didn't say I wanted that," countered Tommy. "I was merely thinking, that's all."

"Well, it's crooked thinking," rasped Burroughs harshly, "and it's about time you were thinking straight."

Tommy went away sadly. It was plain that to Mr. Burroughs his sincere effort to be just was nothing more than disloyalty. He was perplexed.

What a complicated business life was! Instincts, emotion, reason — all running on different tracks, sometimes in quite opposite directions. It was inevitable that there should be smash-ups!

He went back to his billing, resolved that he would forget these tugging calls of yea and nay. Billing was quite enough to occupy a fellow. Who was he, anyway, to determine what ought to be?

A victorious army never halts, saying: Thus far and no more. The conqueror seeks out and destroys — utterly. Not a tenth or a fifth or half, but utterly. The essence of conquest is entirety.

Mr. Burroughs expressed this somewhat recondite abstraction to Tommy a few days later. He spoke with the grimly quiet resignation of a man in flight. "The teamsters have decided to walk out," he said. "A little more straw on the poor old camel!"

"They threaten a strike?"

"They do!"

"Well?"

Mr. Burroughs' lips drew back, exposing his strong white teeth, locked in a resolute line. "They're going — to — get — it!"

"You mean?"

"I mean that the time has come to halt and fight." His icy repression left him for a moment, and he

burst into a flare of white-hot rage. "By heavens, I'll fight that bunch of robbers to a standstill if it takes every nickel I've got!"

"But the others — the rest of the pay roll?"

"Let 'em do as they like. It's now or never. The directors are back of me. If we yield now, we'll never stop. We've *got* to fight. It's now or never, I tell you."

"You've told them — the teamsters, I mean?"

"I've done more. I've arranged for strike breakers and guards. I——" He broke off suddenly and his keen eyes flashed. "Can you use a gun?"

"Why, yes. What for?" Tommy experienced a sense of chill. Mr. Burroughs' expression was singularly ominous.

"Because there's going to be trouble. We've got an injunction against picketing, and that means a scrap sure. I'm going to have you, and men I can trust, sworn in as deputy sheriffs. Those fellows are going to find that John Burroughs can be bluffed and bullied *just* so far!"

"It's too bad!" sighed Tommy from the bottom of his heart.

Mr. Burroughs looked up sharply, a little suspicious. "What is?" he demanded.

"It — it seems so like — like — well, treachery," went on Tommy meditatively. "And yet I don't suppose it really is."

"What d'ye mean — treachery?" Mr. Burroughs' suspicion was plainly deepening.

Tommy sighed. "Oh, I thought everybody would be so tickled about Frembalite — and they weren't. They didn't care. They — they aren't part of the company at all. They just work for it. It — it's hard to express it, but you know what I mean. They aren't patriotic; they're just mercenaries."

Mr. Burroughs exhibited something like relief. "Of course. That's exactly what I've always told you."

Tommy went on, as if in expressing his thoughts he was trying merely to resolve order out of chaos without caring particularly who heard them or how they sounded: "They aren't part of the organization; that's the trouble. We used to run up against the same thing in college. Fellows sometimes would get to thinking of their fraternity as more important than the university as a whole. That made politics. It — it wasn't right."

Mr. Burroughs sneered. "What do these precious thugs care about rightness or gratitude — or any other decent emotion?"

Tommy continued, as if he had not heard the interruption: "They aren't a part of the team. They don't care what happens to it. It's funny. I can't understand it. They're decent chaps, really. Dolan, for instance. And yet they'll spoil everything, strik-

ing like this. It's a rotten shame! Just when things are moving so nicely, too!"

A shrewd smile flickered in Burroughs' eyes, and he laid his hand on Tommy's arm. "Don't worry, son," he said. "They aren't going to strike — not many of them. And those who do will be coming back pretty soon with their tails between their legs. We'll lick 'em Cass — by thunder, we will!"

"Not strike?" echoed Tommy. "Why not?"

"Because, my boy, it won't be wise. We've got a pension fund, you know. Any man who goes out forfeits that. It'll make a lot of the older men think twice, I guess."

"But suppose they don't ——"

Mr. Burroughs' face became like flint. "I've told you. We'll fight 'em to a finish. If this business can't be run except at the dictation of a lot of teamsters and freight handlers, then, by the Lord, it won't be run at all!"

In the hall Tommy stood undecided for a moment. Then slowly he descended the stairs which led to the factory.

He went straight to Jake, the soft-spoken old man who had proved his friendship in his first days in the shop. He put his question without preliminaries: "How long have you been with the concern, Jake?"

The old mechanic looked up from his bench, mildly surprised at the bluntness of the question.

"Since it started," he replied quietly.

"You've heard about the teamsters?"

The old man nodded.

"They claim they'll take the rest of the plant out with them."

Again the enigmatic nod.

"Will *you* go?"

For a fraction of an instant the old man hesitated. Then his head inclined slowly in assent.

Tommy was nonplussed. He kept his feelings in leash, however, merely saying curtly: "You'll throw away your pension."

Jake shrugged his gaunt shoulders. "It's the principle, Tom."

With a world tumbling about his ears, Tommy merely signified by a gesture that he was listening, and the old mechanic went on quietly.

"If the teamsters go out alone," he said, "they can't win. They need the skilled hands, too. Labor's got to stick together, I guess. I got no choice." He seemed quite resigned, and if he felt resentment or reluctance he concealed it well.

"You may not get your job back when it's over," said Tommy, consciously cruel.

The old man smiled wryly. "Prob'ly not."

"And your pension?"

"I'm a single man," was the simple reply.

"You don't want to quit, do you?"

The answer was succinct but awesome in its revelation, like the sudden flare in the sky when a locomotive fire door is opened: "Gawd, no!"

Tommy rapped out a disgusted oath. "You're going to throw up a perfectly good job and all that goes with it, just because a lot of idiotic loafers tell you to?"

"No, son," was the response, uttered with a wealth of unconscious dignity; "because I ought to."

Tommy went away saddened and perplexed. Mr. Burroughs had said that "those fellows" cared nothing for right or gratitude — that the finer emotions were beyond their ken. In one light, the bitter charge almost seemed true. And yet here was a man quietly sacrificing everything he possessed, discounting the future, for nothing more tangible than an ideal. He expected nothing for himself. He sought nothing.

Tommy recalled his own harsh verdict of "treachery." Perhaps it had been merited. But it hardly squared with the spectacle of this simple old man quite cheerfully offering himself up on the altar of loyalty to what he conceived to be his class.

It was a baffling paradox. He groaned inwardly at the dreadful complexity of it all. If only that splendid selflessness of which Jake was a symbol could be broadened and deepened, vitalized, har-

nessed to bigger things!

If those wonderful qualities of courage, of energy, of devotion to a cause, of readiness to sacrifice individual comfort for the good of one's fellows — if they could but be utilized for progress instead of mutual destruction! If the efficiency, the organizing genius of Burroughs could be made to overcome his dulling conservatism; and, on the other hand, if the blind, but rather noble, groping upward of the toilers could be controlled against their folly and their passion!

If men would only work as a team!

Tommy almost cried out in the agony of his utter bewilderment before life. And then, as if an angel has whispered to his soul, he thought of the green scarf.

Was the answer to it all something bigger and finer than comfort and prosperity and things running along smoothly?

Would peace come to the world only when men, clever as well as dull, lived to give rather than to get?

Was *that* what one found in Mecca?

The wail of the noon whistle rent the air. It was like the agony of a birth cry — the never-ending parturition of progress. *The strike was on.*

CHAPTER XIII

IT WAS very quickly made clear that it was to be no half-hearted struggle. What the men lacked of organization or definite purpose they made up for in a peculiarly savage ruthlessness.

The teamsters, having union affiliations and precedent to guide them, went out precisely on schedule at twelve o'clock. The shipping-room force followed an hour later. And all through the afternoon the defections continued. The older men put down their tools soberly, with a reluctance all too evident. Youth was bitter and resentful. But when the revolt reached the girls, it took on an almost festive quality; they trooped out gay and laughing, as if it were all a kind of lark.

The women and many of the older men dispersed at once to their homes. Some of the latter knew too well, by experience, what was coming, and they had no desire to share in it. But the younger men remained, standing about in sullen groups or clustered like flies around neighboring bars.

It was a damp, gloomy day, with the smoke clouds hanging low and motionless over the city. The somber atmosphere seemed reflected in the men.

They wandered to and fro irresolutely, talking in growling undertones, with an occasional drunken voice raised raucously. They seemed to be waiting for something — no one knew exactly what.

But there were those in the crowd who did know. Grim, cold-eyed men, with ready tongues and much understanding. Energetic, keen-witted fellows, who talked freely and inflammably, but whose heads were exceedingly cool. Proselyting for a cause, they were, and intent upon large ends — ends of which the cursing neophytes knew nothing. It was of little moment to these shrewd incendiaries that the horde of toilers which listened to them might win a few extra cents on the day's wages. There was a greater prize than that. If, at the end of the struggle, one could write a matter-of-fact report that a new "Local" or two had emerged, then one might well rejoice. That report would join others, always moving upward, gathering volume and significance as it rose, until at last it reached the desk of a bald-headed little man far away, a cigar maker by trade, but a prophet by circumstance, who would digest it all and speak a little louder of the "majesty of labor."

If there was activity on the street, there was quite as much within the gray old stronghold of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company. Once committed to the course, Mr. Burroughs acted with

characteristic determination.

A high board fence already surrounded the plant, save for a few small gaps. These were promptly filled, and weak points strengthened. Guards were posted at the gates, with strict orders to admit no one unidentified.

Tommy, in common with the rest of the office force, watched these preparations in horrified fascination. Their meaning was clear to him, as it was also clear to the sullen groups on the street. Burroughs meant to make good his threat to the uttermost. He was going to fight to a finish.

Late that afternoon the first contingent of strike breakers arrived, sent, as Tommy was amazed to discover, by a corporation which specialized in just such service. These men were of two distinct types. One group, and by far the largest, was composed of individuals rather dull and timorous in appearance. It was not surprising to find, later, that many of them were foreigners, speaking little or no English. The other group was quite different. Its members were anything but timid. They walked with an almost provocative swing to the shoulders, a certain jaunty recklessness manifest in nearly all of them. These were the "guards," the "special police," hardy adventurers to whom scruples constituted an abstraction without vitality, and to whom fighting, for its own sake, was the breath of life.

Their leader, a saturnine man with a nasal drawl, excessively scarred, posted them at strategic points around the property. It sent a chill down Tommy's spine to see the rifle with which each man was armed. Silently they took their places, their weapons slung ready for use, and an expression on their faces which said quite plainly that they did not consider themselves merely ornamental.

This performance did not chill the men outside; it maddened them. The rambling, low-toned discussions gave place to shouted epithets. The saloons were rapidly increasing their inflammatory assistance, and before long stones were flying as well as oaths.

Night fell, however, without any particularly untoward incident. Mr. Burroughs remained until late, overseeing the arrangements for housing and feeding the strike breakers and the mercenaries who protected them. Tommy, partly from duty and partly from curiosity, stayed with him.

There was still a mob around the gate when they went out, about ten o'clock, and he experienced the altogether unpleasant sensation of being the object of definite hate. Mr. Burroughs, however, seemed imperturbability itself. Tommy envied him for it, but his own ears burned under the insults shouted at him. Once a stone whizzed by his head.

"Cowards!" snapped Burroughs, without in-

creasing his pace by a fraction.

Tommy was suffused with sudden anger. He half halted. "I'd like to go back an' clean 'em up!" he growled youthfully.

Burroughs took his arm. "They're too full of booze to appreciate the honor. Don't look around."

Tommy seized upon the word gratefully and his wrath faded. "Full of booze—poor devils!"

When Tommy reached the plant next morning, he found the crowd around the gate considerably larger, and, after a night of reflection upon its wrongs, to say nothing of the absorption of large quantities of alcohol, considerably uglier.

He was recognized as he shouldered his way through the press, and a sudden torrent of abuse fell upon him. He turned scarlet at the words he heard. When he was almost at the gate, some one gave him a vicious thrust, which almost took him off his feet. He swung around, his fists clenched.

"Who did that?" he barked. "I'll——"

Before he could finish the sentence, a strong hand had seized his coat collar, and a sudden yank brought him inside the safety of the barricade. He heard the gate slam behind him, and he realized that his rapid entrance was due to one of the "special police," who stood beside him, grinning.

"Sorry, lad," said the man, biting off a chew of tobacco. "But it ain't 'visable to scrap with them

guys — not with yer fists. They's cowards alone, but they'll do ye up when they's in a bunch like that!"

"Thanks," said Tommy briefly. The guard was doubtless right, but he'd like to have had one crack at that chap — just one!

Although it was early, he found Mr. Burroughs already down and busy in the almost hopeless task of making the new men reasonably productive. Fortunately the more skilled labor among the old hands had for the most part remained loyal, despite the utmost efforts to get them out with the teamsters and the others. But it was quite sufficiently difficult to make even a packer out of a man who in all his life had never done anything more exact or delicate than excavate trenches. Still, by the exercise of patience and the utmost restraint, and by all sorts of inducements in the way of bonuses and the like, order was gradually secured out of the chaos.

Hourly, however, it grew more plain that the struggle was to be a bitter one. One of the new men, driving a truck, was set upon by the mob outside and dragged from his seat. He was saved from severe handling only by the prompt appearance of a guard flourishing a rifle.

Later in the morning, a similar attack was made. But on this occasion, the guard, who was riding beside the driver of the truck, was less restrained.

He promptly unlimbered his rifle and fired into the mob. A boy was wounded in the thigh. The crowd was dispersed, but at the price of tremendously deepened hostility.

Mr. Burroughs shook his head wearily when he heard the news. "It's always the way. Bums and agitators see their chance, and, before you know it, ordinarily decent, self-respecting workingmen are acting like a lot of criminals. Well, if they want fight, I guess they're going to get it!"

As the day wore on, acts of violence became more numerous. A telephone message from Frembach, at the powder mills, said that two attempts had been made to set fire to the buildings. The situation grew so serious that the city-police reserves were called out, and there was talk of the militia. And late in the afternoon Mr. Burroughs himself, heavily guarded, went out to take charge. There was no telling what Frembach, left to himself, might do.

Tommy found himself fully occupied in the shop, utilizing his own experience in the instruction of the new men. But at the end of the day he hurried up to find Anne. He discovered her seated at her desk, staring pensively out of the window.

Her greeting was quite cheerful, however. "Hello!" she cried brightly. "I feel as if I was in a beleaguered fortress."

He did not accept her cue of levity. "See here,

Anne," he said seriously, "you'd better take a vacation until this thing is over."

"Why on earth should I do that?"

"Because it's dangerous, and getting worse. One of the guards shot a man today, and they're in an ugly temper. I—I don't like your coming down here."

She laughed easily. "Nonsense! They wouldn't hurt *me*."

"Maybe the men wouldn't—not intentionally. But when stones are flying, somebody's bound to get hit. Then there's the girls. You can't tell what they might do."

As he spoke, he went over and seated himself on the window sill. "You can see 'em from here, can't you? Look at 'em run! The police! The cops certainly keep them on the move, all right. Hello! What the dickens was that?"

"Oh, Tommy!" Anne was out of her chair and at his side. The smile had left her face; it was white with terror. "Quick!" she cried. "Get away from the window!"

Her pointed finger was eloquent, and he lost no time in obeying her command. In the window, not a foot above where his head had been, was a jagged hole. He knelt down, fumbling in the broken glass.

"What are you looking for?" she asked, her

voice trembling with deep concern.

"Here it is," he answered, holding up a bit of white stone which glistened in the twilight. "I—I think it'll make a nice souvenir."

"Oh, Tommy!" She covered her face with her hands and sank into the chair.

He was at her side in a bound. "Good Lord, Anne, what are you crying about?"

"It—it might have hit you!" she quavered.

His eyes opened wonderingly. "You—you're crying because—because I—I might have got hurt?" A smile of awe softened his features, and he drew a long breath. "You mean you—you ——"

But her loss of poise was only momentary. A quick gesture with her handkerchief, and she was herself again. "Where is Mr. Burroughs?" she asked, without permitting their eyes to meet.

"Over with Frembach," he answered shortly. "Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered."

Gloom succeeded the radiance of the vanished moment. His lips set and he opened the door. "If you're ready, we'll go now."

"We?"

"Yes. I'm going to see you to the car."

She tried to ease the strained atmosphere. "You?" she laughed. "What can you do against

a mob of howling Davids?"

For reply his hand went to his hip and he jerked forth an automatic pistol. "Never fired this at a man, but I guess I could," he snapped crisply.

"Oh!" was all she said. But she was thinking that any one who put himself in the path of this broad-shouldered youth would be most unwise. "Oh!" she repeated, as she followed him into the hall. It came over her, almost embarrassingly, that his mere presence afforded her a quite ridiculous sense of security.

"There's really no need of your going with me," she insisted again.

He made no answer.

At the entrance used by the office workers, they found comparatively few of the strikers, and these few kept constantly on the move by several uniformed policemen. Nevertheless, it was not possible to run the gauntlet without hearing things which crimsoned Tommy's cheek. His soul was seething with anger, but he kept his eyes straight ahead, and he breathed a profound sigh of relief when they were at last out of earshot.

"That was dreadful," she said frankly. "How fighting changes people!"

He was not sure. "Fighting doesn't change 'em. It's like liquor; it merely shows 'em up."

"Then you think we're all brutes — naturally?"

"Nearly everybody," was his brusque admission.

She did not press the argument. She found him perverse and unreasonable. The reason she knew only too well.

Her car did not come for some time. For a little while they chatted on indifferent topics. Then she said: "You're going back, I suppose?"

He nodded. "We've got cots fixed up, and meals come in from the restaurant across the street."

"It's terrible!" There was no secret of her aversion for the whole proceedings.

"It'll soon be over," he said confidently. "They can't hold out. Not when they see their bluff's been called."

She sighed. "It's the first strike in the history of the company."

The bell of the approaching street car clanged. He seized her arm. "Anne — I want you to stay away until this thing is settled. Please!"

She looked into his eyes for an instant. Then she shook her head gently. "Miss Gallery's not staying away. Nor Miss ——"

"Oh, I know," he pleaded. "But that's different. You ——"

The sentence was unfinished. She had gotten on the car. She waved to him from the platform. "See you in the morning," she called gayly.

He turned away with a sigh. Then his face

cleared. "Good girl!" he whispered softly.

Anne's car had been more belated than he realized, and it was well after dark when he turned his steps back toward the factory. It occurred to him that he would probably be too late for supper, so he dropped into a near-by lunch counter. It was nearly eight o'clock when he finally arrived at the seat of war.

Something new and ominous oppressed him almost before he was inside the gate. The place was surprisingly quiet. The boisterous singing of the strike breakers which had marked the evening before was absent. The stillness weighed on Tommy's heart like lead. He paused for a moment, striving to understand the mysterious portents in the air. Then he hurried up the stairs to the loft which had been utilized as a dormitory, the blood pounding in his veins.

The strange forebodings of evil were justified by the sight which met his gaze as he entered the long, narrow room.

At the far end was a silent group, clustered about a cot, their faint movements casting grotesque shadows in the light from a single electric bulb dangling overhead. Occasional subdued whispers came from the little knot of men.

A dark figure flitted by him. Tommy held out his hand. "What's up?" he cried.

The man stopped, peering into his face. "The dirty hounds have done it this time, all right!" His hoarse voice trailed off into a guttural stream of blasphemy.

"Done what?" Tommy almost ceased to breathe.

"They's croaked one of the dagos. Mebbe two. The doctor's wit' the other guy now."

With another volley of curses, the man hurried on. Tommy went over to the group around the cot. The questions which sprang to his lips died at what he saw.

A tall man, his face a greenish gray, lay stretched on the pallet, breathing stertorously. A figure in shirt sleeves, who had been bending over the unconscious form of the strike breaker, straightened up, and Tommy recognized Wilson, the company physician.

He seized the doctor's arm. "What's happened?"

Wilson did not recognize him immediately in the dim light, and shook his hand off, grunting something unintelligible. But when Tommy made his identity clear, he answered without hesitation: "Something in the soup. It's being analyzed now. Arsenic, I think. One man's dead, and——"

"*Dead!*" Tommy clutched at his throat. The drab coolness with which the doctor made the statement intensified its horror.

"Yep. Maybe I can save this fellow, though. I've pumped out his stomach and filled him full of castor oil."

Tommy was too appalled for a moment to speak. The suddenness of the tragedy, its eerie staging, made speech impossible. Finally he managed to make an all but inarticulate plea for enlightenment: "Arsenic — in the soup. I — I don't understand."

The doctor was quite matter of fact. "Those beggars on the street probably slipped the dope in the soup on its way over. The boy who brought it said they crowded him and ——"

"Why — but that's murder!"

"Sure," said the doctor cheerfully. "Why not?"

Tommy covered his eyes. "I — I can't believe it!"

The doctor was philosophic. "They're desperate, you know."

"But this is — is so cowardly." Tommy was overcome by the ghastliness of the affair, and he sank weakly on a near-by cot. "It's awful!" Then the horror of it vanished in a storm of black rage. He leaped to his feet, every nerve tingling with passion. "The snakes!" he gritted savagely through his clenched teeth. "The cowards! They'll pay for this!" His hand went to his hip, fingering the big pistol, and his face was contorted.

The doctor, both by training and temperament,

was imperturbable. Furthermore, until a fragment of high-explosive shell had put an end to his usefulness, he had been in charge of a dressing station on the Ypres salient; his views upon such abstractions as life and death and murder and cowardice were, in consequence, extremely heterodox. A smile, tolerant and ineffably sad, illumined his features, and he took Tommy by the arm, leading him gently away from the scene by the cot.

"Don't misunderstand me, Cass," he said earnestly. "I'm not defending it. It was murder — and dirty, sneaking murder at that. But don't forget this: A strike is only another name for war. And *everything* goes in war. I know." A momentary shadow of pain darkened his face, and his thoughts seemed far away. Then he resumed quietly: "Those fellows who did this are fighting for their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor."

"They think they are," interrupted Tommy bitterly.

"It's the same thing. Right or wrong, they're fighting. These chaps in here, the poor devil who's dead — well, they're the enemy. As long as they're left on the job, they're winning. If they can't be put off any other way, why — kill 'em! That's what war is, when you peel the sentimental nonsense off — *just killing!*"

"Gee — you're cold-blooded!" exclaimed Tommy from the heart.

The doctor sighed. "Not I. But death doesn't stir my pulse much any more."

"Well, it stirs mine!" cried Tommy. "Would you sit tight and let those swine get away with stuff like this? Wouldn't you ——"

Wilson held up his hand. "I told you not to misunderstand. I'm neither practical nor ethical. I can't tell you what you ought to do, nor whether it's right if you do it. I'm merely asking you to remember that, put in the same fix, even you — yes, *you* — might poison somebody's soup, too. War isn't a ball game, with the bench for rowdy play. It — it's war, that's all. I — I could tell you stories ——"

"It — it's a horrible shock to me," muttered Tommy, choking. "I — I never ran up against anything like this."

The doctor nodded sympathetically. "I know. I cursed like a madman over the first case I had at the front. A beautiful lad — his face gone! God, how I raved at the Germans! But one gets over that."

"I suppose so," said Tommy wretchedly. His head dropped upon his breast. He was not aware of it when the doctor slipped quietly away to his still-unconscious patient.

Tommy never knew how long he sat in reverie, pondering on the doctor's words. But presently, as if it had always been there, he became conscious of a resolve in his soul, crystal clear and insistent. He rose soberly. His features were composed, not grimly, but in the mild resoluteness with which brave men, unconscious of their bravery, face peril.

Wilson caught a glimpse of him as he passed on his way out. The boy's expression startled him. He had seen it before. Once, on the face of a spy in Picardy, being led out to be shot. Again on the face of a young British soldier who had volunteered to bring in a wounded comrade from a shell-swept field. He had seen it many times, but never too often to dull his awe. Always it brought a catch to his throat, and a feeling of tears. There was an exquisite beauty in it, a poignancy of emotion aroused which could not be expressed. He wondered what it signified, radiant and mysterious, in the gleaming eyes of young Cass.

It was true. Tommy *had* made a resolution — a resolution so reasonable, so profoundly simple, that few would have thought of it or comprehended it at all if they had. There were many people who considered Tommy a trifle "queer," largely because, in a world filled with self-imposed complexities and grinning shadow shapes born of perverse imagination, the next step, the obvious step, is, to most of

us, the last one thought of. Essentially simple people always seem "queer." While those about him debated and philosophized and in devious indirection sought their ends, Tommy always did the magnificently mad thing of going straight to the point.

He halted, thoughtful, for a moment outside the dormitory. Then he went downstairs to the locker room and put away his pistol. For such a task as he had set for himself weapons would be a hindrance. This done, he smiled, with the same placid resolution on his face which had so intrigued the doctor, and slipped out of the factory by the rear door.

He knew exactly where to go, thanks to his earnest efforts through the months to familiarize himself by actual experience with the lives of the humbler workers. The saloon of Mrs. Ruby Winternitz was the axis about which a large part of the human equation in the Champion Paint and Varnish Company revolved.

He hesitated on the street outside underneath the gas-lighted sign. The growling throb of many voices came to him through the rattan doors, and the shuffle of heavy feet on the sawdust-covered floor. He hesitated, partly because he was doubtful and partly because he was afraid. It was a testimony to his courage that he knew he was afraid.

Then he pulled himself together sharply and

pushed open the swinging doors. Momentarily blinded by the abrupt change from the dark street to the many lights within, he stood motionless. For an instant, but a long one, he was merely a newcomer, quite ignored. Then some one in the sweating, arguing crowd lined up before the bar recognized him. His name was shouted, with a scurrilous epithet for emphasis. As if by magic, utter silence fell upon the place. And then, as iron filings group themselves about the poles of a magnet, there was a noisy scuffle of boots, and Tommy found himself in the center of an ominously inquiring circle of faces. He recognized many of those staring at him — faces of men whom in days past he had called friends. But there was no friendliness in them now.

"Well," said one presently, when the silence had become unbearable. "What do *you* want?"

Tommy's lip curled. "Nothing with you, McGraw. Where's Devine and Wetzel and——"

"What d'ye want them for?" The question came from a short, heavily built man with dull, furtive eyes, who had thrust himself forward in the crowd.

Tommy surveyed the newcomer coldly. "That," he answered deliberately, "is *my* business."

The man laughed soundlessly, showing a line of ragged, yellow teeth. "Your business, eh? You

come from Burroughs, I guess."

"I come for myself."

"About the strike?"

"What business is that of yours?"

The smaller man's lips drew back wolfishly, and his teeth clinked on the answer: "I happen to be runnin' this show. If ye got anythin' to say, say it to me. An' say it quick. My name's Moran."

From the respectful attention accorded this speech by the others, it was evident that he spoke the truth. Tommy eyed him. "You're responsible for what goes on?" His voice trembled ever so slightly.

"I am."

"Then, Mr. Moran"—Tommy's jaw was thrust out, and he stepped forward—"you're the dirtiest cur that ever drew breath!"

The small man paled at the insult, and a threatening growl went up from his followers. But his emotions were well under control.

"Why?" he asked smoothly.

Tommy turned to the men clustering about him. His eyes blazed and he swept their heavy faces contemptuously. "You fools!" he snapped. "To trust a rattlesnake——"

"Hol' on, kid!" Moran, still calm, but ominous, raised his hand. "Be careful what ye say."

For reply Tommy's clenched fist shook under the other's nose. "You keep your mouth shut, you—

you *murderer!*"

Moran's hand, quick as lightning, went to his pocket. But Tommy, a boxer from childhood, was quicker. The weapon flashed in the air and clattered harmlessly on the floor as Tommy's wiry fingers closed around the other's wrist. At the same time, like a rock from a catapult, Tommy's left shot out, and Moran went sprawling, his lips aflame with curses. A startled growl from the others echoed him. Tommy felt the menacing ring tighten around him. Hot, sweating faces, grotesquely shadowed in the dancing gas-light, were thrust into his.

"Wait!" he shouted above the clamor. "D'you fellows know what's happened?"

"No," was the jeering response from the outskirts of the mob. "But we know what will!" A burst of ribald laughter greeted the sally.

Tommy tried again, and the blazing earnestness in his eyes compelled to silence. "I called that cur on the floor a murderer. I meant murderer. In the factory tonight, one of the men——"

"Scabs!" snarled a raucous voice.

"A scab if you like. But he's dead. D'you hear that? Dead from food poisoned by you. If that man"—he thrust a trembling finger at Moran, just getting to his feet—"if that man's responsible, he'll hang for it. But you"—his hand swept the mob in a fiercely scornful gesture—"every

cowardly, sneaking one of you's responsible for *him!*"

It was news to all of them — startling news. A sudden hush fell upon them, and men looked at one another or at the floor, stirring uncomfortably. But Moran was no mean psychologist. And he was experienced. In that shocked, hesitant moment he saw very clearly the peril to his own power and to the cause it represented. He stepped forward.

"One man's dead, you say?" he asked quietly.

"Yes," answered Tommy. "Are you proud?"

"Dead, eh?" Moran turned slightly and his flickering gray eyes searched the dull faces about him. Abruptly his voice rose. "Hell, then there's one less scab to steal our jobs off'n us!" he cried passionately. "There ain't a death that's quick enough fer a scab. Murder, eh? What d'ye call it w'en the bosses grind the poor workingman down an' down until he wishes he was dead, if he ain't? That's worse than murder! Am I right, boys?"

He swung round to the listening men and his leaden eyes glittered. Not for nothing had he acquired his reputation as an "organizer." He was an exceedingly wise little man. He knew just how slightly men think and how infinitely more they feel. The instinct for leadership was his in full measure — the chill brain and the flaming tongue, buttressed with the imponderables of gesture and

voice. And incidentally he really meant a great deal, if not perhaps quite all, that he said.

For an instant the decision trembled in the balance. Then, with a snarling volley of oaths, they gave testimony to his power. He turned back to Tommy, a faint, ironic smile flickering in the gray depths of his eyes.

"Go back to the guy who sent ye!" he shouted hoarsely, the venom in his voice contrasting strangely with the quiet acumen of his smile. "Tell 'im there ain't no mercy in our hearts fer scabs—nor fer them as hires 'em. Tell 'im he's got a fight on 'is hands. Mebbe he thinks we're playing pinochle—but we ain't!"

Harsh laughter echoed the pleasantry, and the men, every hesitant emotion quelled, surged forward, definitely menacing.

In the cruel derision of that laughter Tommy saw clearly that he had lost, and the color mounted in his cheeks. "Don't go too far," he pleaded, almost tearfully. "Murder is murder, for all this fellow can say."

"Tell yer boss that," jeered Moran. "How many men's been killed in that plant o' his?"

Tommy's voice shook with the earnestness of his appeal. "Poison," he began, all the loathing of his soul for the underhanded burning in the word. But Moran interrupted.

"Yeah, poison," he repeated savagely. "How many men has Burroughs dosed with lead poisonin' in his lovely paint fact'ry? He's the undertaker's bes' friend, he is!"

There was a hoarse burst of appreciation for the bitter jest, and a flood of jeering catcalls. Tommy shrugged his shoulders wearily and turned to go. It was all over. His attempt at "getting together" had failed miserably. He felt enormously humiliated. It could not even be said, he realized presently, that he had failed in his purpose. He had had no purpose. He had fared forth like a knight of old—or perhaps merely like a very small and unsophisticated boy, with no more definite purpose than to appeal to reasonableness and decency and fairness. He had found none of those things. He had found only a passion-swept, unreasoning hate—simply incomprehensible. He himself had never really hated any one or anything in all his amiable young life. It flashed upon him painfully that one cannot hope to fight fire who has never been burned.

On the whole, he had merely succeeded in making himself ridiculous.

The affair might have ended there. He had nothing more to say, and he meant to go out of the saloon quietly and resignedly. But Moran, like many a greater general, o'erleaped himself in the flush of victory.

His yellow teeth bared in a sneer. "You'd better go while the goin's good," he said, with a scornful laugh.

Tommy halted as if stopped by a blow, swinging sharply on his heel. Disappointment and humiliation vanished and he turned suddenly white. He had not only been unsuccessful; he had been misunderstood. They thought his quiet departure *flight!* The idea was intolerable. Primal instincts burst the trappings of reasonableness. He stepped toward Moran.

"Were you talking to me?" he asked frostily.

"Aw, fergit it!" was the reply, accompanied by an epithet not printable.

Tommy's fist leaped out like a sword from its scabbard. There was the indescribable crunch of flesh against flesh and Moran for the second time went down in a smother of curses.

For an instant there was startled silence. Then, with an animal snarl, a dozen figures leaped for revenge. Tommy seized a chair and backed toward the door, brandishing it above his head. "Keep off!" he shouted. A man dived for his legs, and the chair came crashing down in a vicious splintering. The man collapsed like a wet rag and lay very still, a dark stain widening in the sawdust around his head. "Keep off, I say! I'll kill the first man who starts anything!" The blood lust

was in his nostrils, drowning out such ordinary things as reasonableness and the stench of stale beer. He knew hate at last! There was a burning glitter in his eyes, and his lips were parted in something like a smile. A cruel, ruthless, killing smile.

A bottle came hurtling through the air, smashing musically on the wall behind him. Three men rushed him at once. The broken fragment of the chair rose and fell like the walking beam of a steamboat and he kicked out savagely with his foot. One of the men stumbled and fell on his face, grotesque and inert. Another backed off, nursing a wrist which hung limp like a broken wing. But the third, sprawling before a blow which opened a grinning red gash in his lip, thrust out his foot shrewdly. Tommy spun around, ducked quickly to avoid another bottle, lost his balance on the slippery sawdust, and went down heavily, swinging what was left of the chair in murderous circles.

The mob fell upon him in an avalanche of sweating, clawing flesh. A sharp pain stabbed him in the cheek and he felt the taste of blood. Something heavy struck him in the forehead, almost stunning him. One eye was dim. "The cowards!" he sobbed, tearing and thrusting at the countless greasy faces closing in upon him. "It wasn't fair!" He was wearying rapidly. His arms were wooden. He

fought savagely, his breath coming in gasps. The tears rolled down his cheeks in an ecstasy of anger. God! How he hated them!

Then there was an explosion in the back of his head as of a thousand cannon and he lost consciousness. But not until he had heard a shrill cry of warning and the quick rush of scattering feet. Before the black pall closed over him he realized dimly that he was lying in the chaos of broken glass and blood and wrecked chairs, quite alone.

Presently he became aware that the floor under him had grown strangely soft and that it was rolling and swaying like a ship in a gale. He tried to remember what had happened. The problem was too difficult. He decided to postpone it. For the present it was enough to know that he ached in a thousand places and that the top of his head had apparently been removed, exposing the raw brain, upon which red-hot salt had been liberally sprinkled.

He opened his eyes, blinking. "What's up?" he whispered feebly. There was no answer. Then he heard the muffled clang of a bell from somewhere near at hand. "I say!" he shouted, beginning to be alarmed. "What the dickens is going on?" Still there was no reply, though he fancied he heard voices.

He stretched out his arm. It touched something soft and yielding, slightly rough. He was extremely

puzzled. He could distinguish nothing around him, though his eyes were unquestionably wide open. He raised his voice to shout another frantic question. But the jolting suddenly stopped and a stream of dim light poured in from behind his head.

"Oh, ho," he muttered from between lips which seemed oddly thick, "I appear to be in an ambulance!"

"Feelin' better, are you?" said a gruff voice at his elbow.

Despite considerable pain, Tommy sat upright. "I've not only gone to the wars, Lucasta," he said gravely, addressing the darkness, "but I've come back."

He had a detached certainty that the observation was perhaps ambiguous; that it might not be understood. Some one might even think him out of his head. He resolved to be silent. The clouds in his brain dissipated presently and he was able to express his determination to leave the ambulance without assistance quite rationally. He climbed out alone, albeit a trifle unsteady as to legs.

It was obvious that he had suffered a very adequate beating, and he was a little aggrieved that more sympathy was not extended by the hospital attendants. Like people who loathe dancing but love to be invited, he had no desire to tarry in the disagreeable precincts of white linen and iodoform, but

he did think they might at least urge him not to hurry away. He considered the examination of his battered head to be little short of perfunctory, and the way he was dismissed was almost insulting. Singular weakness—pride! Man yields to it on any pretext, even to a battered head.

In the taxi which took him home, however, he forgot the chill indifference of doctors, and even chuckled at his own resentment. He had other things to think about.

He had, of course, by his visit to the saloon of the Widow Winternitz, accomplished exactly nothing. And yet the moment that fact was established he began to think that the visit, even to its all but tragic outcome, had not been without a certain profit. He had learned one truth permanently, indisputably, and attested the discovery with his own blood, viz.: that war was war, whether it spent itself in the mud of Flanders, over abstractions of polity and economics, or poisoned inoffensive strike breakers who fondly believed in their inalienable right to work for whom, when, and what they chose.

The men in uniform who pulled the lanyards of 4.7 instruments of destruction in an earnest effort to blow the world into sympathy with their social and political ideals were merely a magnification of the sweating mob which had tried to kill him with

beer bottles and broken chairs because he differed with them. The principle behind the nobly waving battle flag and the ignobly waving fist of Mr. Moran was identical. Its essence operated apparently all along the cosmic line, from ice in the creviced rocks to the most recondite ultimates of idealism. And that essence was the perfectly simple and utterly inescapable face of *force*.

One fought to win. No less, no more. If death were a weapon, one used it. Even poison. Cowardly? What of it? What did the conqueror care for the morals of the dogs which dragged his chariot?

He recalled the phrase of Von Buelow, the sardonic old man, peering into the future of Europe: "Pressure — counter pressure — *explosion.*"

Burroughs — the hundreds like him — forever pressing downward with their iron and pitiless hands. And underneath, the knotted backs forever thrusting upward. Explosion? Of course. The thing was inexorable.

And after the explosion — what then? Merely more of them? He did not know.

Was it possible that the heaving back and the heavy hand might one day thrust together?

Was peace — in the large and in the small — possible? He did not know that, either.

But it was worth thinking about.

CHAPTER XIV

THE next day was Sunday. Tommy spent most of the morning in bed, fighting a losing battle against the fear that he would never walk again. He had the word of the ambulance surgeon, as well as even greater savants at the hospital, that he had suffered damage neither vital nor permanent. But he was inclined to think them mistaken.

A quick turn of his head sent torrents of liquid fire down the back of his neck. His teeth felt strangely insecure, and he put his finger on them gingerly, striving to reassure himself. Bruises! With a highly scientific thumb he probed exhaustively over his anatomy. There was not a spot which was not sore to the gentlest touch. Groaning at the movement, he turned over on his side for another doze. The fact that the sun was in his eyes was unpleasant, but the desirability of having the shade drawn seemed scarcely proportionate to the agony of getting out of bed to draw it.

By noontime, however, the pangs of hunger had become more acute than the aching of his limbs. He postponed action, minute by minute, wondering

whether immediate, though purely comparative, comfort offset the emptiness of his stomach. Finally, with a sigh and a resolute compression of the lips, he threw off the covers, and proceeded very carefully to work his stiffened frame into his clothes.

Luncheon, even the enormously unsatisfactory affair of greasy mutton and carbonized potatoes and pale mauve gelatin, with which the boarding house signalized the Sabbath, made him feel much better. Despite a soreness in the back of his head, and one eye almost totally eclipsed in a purple penumbra, he was glad to discover that his dismal outlook of the morning had been unfounded.

The thought made him feel suddenly lonely. There was so much to say, and no one to say it to. No one, that is, who would understand. Old Pop Farr, perhaps. At least he'd *seem* to — which was almost as good. But Pop was somewhere in France, rounding out a contemplation of architecture in driving an ambulance. There was no one in the boarding house. He glanced around the dingy parlor, untidy with the remnants of the Sunday papers. Forgetful of his aching joints, he flew to the telephone.

"Miss Manard, please," he said almost breathlessly. "Hello — Anne? Say, doin' anything this afternoon? Well, how about a walk? Fine! Meet you on the old corner." He hung up the receiver,

chuckling. There certainly was somebody who understood!

He waited until they had found a quiet spot near the lagoon, secure from interruption, before he told her what had happened in the saloon of the Widow Winternitz. His narrative was a rather bald affair, partly because he was temperamentally incapable of elaboration upon his own adventures and partly because he was too painfully conscious of its essential absurdity. But what he reserved or glozed over she was intuitive enough to fill in for herself.

Her eyes grew wide. "Oh, Tommy!" She laid her hand on his arm. He observed, not without satisfaction, that it trembled. "Y-you might have been killed!"

He assented cheerfully. "The police didn't get there a minute too soon."

"But what in the world made you go there—such a dangerous thing to do!"

It was the obvious question, and inevitable, albeit he had hoped against hope that she would not ask it. He squirmed uncomfortably. "I—I'm hanged if I really know," he confessed truthfully.

"But you must have had *some* idea!"

He scratched his head doubtfully. "I suppose I did. But it—it's hard to make anybody understand. I—I don't think I understand it myself."

Her clear eyes looked into his. "Let me try," she urged softly.

"Well, it's simple enough — in a way. Their poisoning that poor wop was like opening a door all of a sudden and seeing — hell. I'd never realized that strikes were as bad as that. I — I couldn't believe somehow that they really meant to do such a thing. It was like being in an argument with a fellow and having him pull a knife on you. I knew a lot of those strikers personally. Mighty decent chaps, too. I just couldn't understand it. I thought they must have gone clean out of their heads. I got the notion that — well, the best thing to do was to get together, sort of, and talk it all over — sensibly."

"What a boy you are!" she murmured, her eyes strangely moist.

"I'm an infant," he answered dejectedly. "I nearly lost my precious scalp learning it, but I did learn it. The thing's gotten past any talking over. Everybody's desperate. Common sense and decency and — well, it's the same sweet mess they're staging in Europe. I was just a little Rollo, the angel child, with a package of tracts, trying to put salt on the tail of a forty-two-centimeter shell!" He laughed at himself scornfully.

She spoke with a catch in her voice. "It wouldn't be good for you, Tommy, if I told you

what I think of you."

"I'm a poor fish!" he insisted brusquely. "I hope nobody but you will ever know what an awful darned fool I was."

"But you're not a darned fool! You—you're splendid!"

He waved the compliment aside derisively. "Indeed I am—a splendid ass, if ever there was one!" Then his mind went on to the bigger problem. "*They* are, too," he declared grimly. "All of them—even Burroughs. It's kill and destroy and fight to beat the enemy. And then what have you got? Why can't we get together before the fighting starts and keep together? Each side needs the other. Why—why should there be sides at all?"

She stared at him, frankly amazed. Was this the diffident, thoughtless lad who had blundered through electro cases scarcely a year ago? It hardly seemed possible.

"Strikes and scrapping and—and, oh, all that sort of thing, are so—so wasteful!" he went on seriously, a deep cleft between his eyes. "Isn't there any way of getting the under dog a square deal without them?"

"What do *you* think?"

He picked up a twig and snapped it between his strong fingers, unconsciously. "You'd probably say that Burroughs—and the men in similar positions

—do give a square deal."

"Don't you think they do?"

"Perhaps—sometimes. But the point is they *give* it, don't you see? It—it's a kind of charity. And the under dog can't help thinking that a square deal's his by right. Burroughs talks about 'reasonable' wages. But there isn't any such thing. A man takes what he can get. He won't admit that there are any limits." He broke off, chuckling to himself.

"What are you laughing at?"

"I was just thinking how different business was from what I thought it was going to be. I—I haven't found what I expected."

"What did you think you'd find?" She tried to concentrate on his answer, but she found herself singularly distracted by his superb complexion, its clear, smooth freshness intensified by the dark stain of the damaged eye.

What had he expected to find? The question found him hesitant.

"Was it money?" she supplied, watching him closely.

"No," he said shortly. "Lord—no!" Then he bit his lip, flushing. "If I tell you what I—I think I'm beginning to find, you—you'll think I'm trying to talk like a little tin saint."

"Perhaps I know without your telling. You're

finding business a bigger thing than you ever thought it was, aren't you, Tommy?"

"It's immense!" he exclaimed fervently.

"More than you dream, boy," she whispered. "But not too big to need you."

"Me? What for?"

"Because you bring to it something that it needs very badly — just such a dear, honest, sentimental heart as yours is." She halted abruptly, as if she feared she had said too much. The moment was pregnant with possibilities, and her heart fluttered. But Tommy's was a mind which ran upon a single track; it did not occur to him to switch.

"Did I ever tell you about Pop Farr — and the green scarf?" he asked reminiscently, his eyes fixed on the circles he was drawing with his stick. "Funny chap, Pop. Queer notions he had."

Something in his voice told her that his soul was opening shyly, like the petals of some rarely flowering plant. It was, she felt, a sacred moment, and she feared to blast it by some careless word.

"Tell me," she urged softly.

So he told her, then, diffidently and with many thoughtful pauses, of his pilgrimage in life. The narrative was a singular compound of boyishness and extraordinary wisdom. At times he spoke like an oracle, scarcely conscious of the significance of what he said. And again, when his imagination

soared highest, he would break off suddenly, laughing bashfully, suspicious that he was talking nonsense.

Women are almost always shrewder than men because they are more content with the semblance of things. They see nothing in a soap bubble but its loveliness. And so it was that in Tommy's rambling story Anne was satisfied to feel a singular charm. She was not critical. She was scarcely conscious of his words, nor of the vibrant eagerness of his voice. She heard no notes and saw no instruments. It was to her as the music of the spheres, ineffable and transcendent — profoundly moving.

"Silly, isn't it?" he said when he had finished.

"No," she answered soberly. "It is very beautiful Tommy. It — it knits everything together. It makes business mean something. The idea's growing, too. Success implies service these days, even when it's selfish. Perhaps when men get a little wiser and don't think so much of being practical — of just serving for its own sake — perhaps then ——"

He looked up at her gratefully. "You don't think I'm nutty, do you, Anne — talking like this?"

She faced him with swimming eyes. "You blessed lad — this hard, blind, old world needs pilgrims like you to lead it up on the high places where

it can see how great its destiny is."

"Maybe so." He shook his head ruefully. "But I'm just a kid. It — it seems so silly for me to think that I know more than Burroughs does."

Instinctively she went to the heart of his difficulty. "You don't know more, Tommy; not nearly as much. Maybe you never will. But you *feel*. It's an absurd comparison to make — she was a girl — but I can't help thinking of Joan of Arc. What did she know of war? But she saw visions. Men will always follow those who see visions."

"You've changed, Anne," he said abruptly. "Last time we talked like this you called me down."

She blushed, caught off her guard. "I — why, I — one has to change, of course. But I ——"

A ray of understanding penetrated his mind. He reached out and took her hand. "You told me I was an empty slate," he whispered, "and now?"

She withdrew her hand quickly, but her breast rose and fell. "You have come up very fast, Tommy," she breathed tremulously.

He watched her, a wondering smile playing about his lips. "Anne — about Burroughs: Is he still ace-high?"

She managed to ask him what he meant.

"You know perfectly well," he replied. "Are all the things he can give you — do they still count so much?"

The movement of her head was delayed, and all but imperceptible when it came. But it satisfied him. A hermit thrush burst into song in the depths of the shrubbery. Tommy waited until the sweetly liquid notes had ceased. Then his arm shot out and around Anne's waist. Almost roughly he drew her toward him.

"I love you, little girl," he breathed huskily, "like the dickens! You — you're the kind of chum I want. I never knew there were girls like you."

She struggled to free herself, but he held her fast. "Please, Tommy," she begged. "You mustn't!"

"Why?" His strong arms tightened. The feel of her supple figure intoxicated him. "I tell you I love you!" he cried passionately. "Nothing whatever matters but that!" He forced her nearer, and his lips met hers in a kiss which turned his blood to fire. "I'm perfectly crazy about you!" Again he kissed her — and again, quite oblivious to the conspicuousness of their situation. Presently it dawned upon him that her efforts to release herself had weakened, that her response to the hot touch of his lips had been more than passive. "Anne!" he cried, suddenly holding her off so that he could see her face. "Tell me! Do you — really?"

Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing rapidly. Then, as if by a physical effort, she seemed to regain control of herself. "You can't possibly

understand, Tommy," she answered nervously. "You — you're so simple. And it isn't simple. But you — you mustn't do that again!"

"You're not angry?" he asked wistfully, the momentary hope fading.

She laughed gently, smoothing the gown he had disarranged. "No, dear boy, I ——" Her voice broke suddenly, and she buried her face in her arms. "Oh, Tommy," she sobbed, "you make me so ashamed of myself! It isn't fair. Why — why did you do that?"

He was perplexed. "Oh, Anne," he cried, profoundly contrite, "what did I do? I'm so sorry!"

It was over in an instant, like a summer shower. He raised her head, her eyes glistening like drops of dew. "Don't pay any attention to me," she murmured, her voice still a trifle unsteady. "But promise me — you won't do that again. You mustn't. You won't, will you?" She rose, straightening her hat.

"I'm not sure," he muttered doggedly. "I'll try to behave myself, if you say so. But unless you marry some one else, by Jiminy, you're going to marry *me!*"

She nibbled at a leaf which had dropped upon her sleeve, and strove to respond lightly. "Then let's postpone — this sort of thing until I decide. It'll be better for both of us."

He rose slowly, and his face was morose. "You're a queer girl, Anne. First you——"

"All girls are queer, Tommy," she said quietly.

"But you're not all girls. You're just one. *The* one!"

With a quick movement she leaned toward him and pulled his hat over his eyes. "Sunset, Tommy," she laughed teasingly. "Let's get back to the world and common sense."

Unsmiling and heavy of heart he followed her across the grass. But his lips still tingled with the recollection of her kiss, and, common sense to the contrary, he could not shake off the conviction that for one ecstatic instant she had reposed in his arms, unresisting. It was absurd to believe it. He deluded himself, no doubt.

It was well enough to sip the honey of the lotos in Arcady for a few exquisite moments, but Tommy found, on Monday morning, that the world was still very much with him.

The news of what had befallen him Saturday night in the saloon of the Widow Winternitz had already reached Mr. Burroughs, and a summons to the latter's office was awaiting him.

He found the president of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company in an evil humor. The grim ghosts of unfilled orders, with rapidly mounting losses, perched upon his desk, mocking him. He

was infuriated and alarmed by the treacherous poisoning, not alone for its inherent horror, but for the desperation it evidenced. The strike was going to be harder to crush than he had expected. He was angry to the depths of his soul.

"Well," he demanded harshly when Tommy came in, "what on earth did you think you were going to accomplish by that business Saturday?"

Tommy was taken aback by the reception accorded him. "Why, I—I thought I might get together with the men——"

"Was that your affair?"

Tommy colored at the sarcastic tone. "No, sir. I don't suppose it was. But I—I knew a lot of the men, and I thought——"

"Pretty poor thinking, Cass. Aside from having made a monkey of yourself, you've made this thing a devil of a lot harder for me."

Tommy was startled. "Why, how's that?

"Well, to begin with, that murder wasn't the work of our men at all. Some officious I. W. W. crank did it. Left to themselves, our men would have been heartily ashamed of it. *I* know them, too. But your going and shouting a lot of silly accusations at them simply amounted to giving the dogs a bad name and letting them live up to it."

"Why, gee whiz!" gasped Tommy. "I never thought——"

"Of course you didn't think. You merely went off half-cocked, without thinking you needed to think. But you did the damage just the same. You crystallized a rather feeble strike into a definitely murderous finish fight. You gave Moran his chance. The men had been apathetic before. But when you went for him the way you did you simply made a martyr out of him."

"Why, I can't believe——"

Mr. Burroughs' lacerated nerves gave way, and he burst into an intemperate wrath quite foreign to him normally. "Good God, Cass! Why can't you attend to your own affairs, instead of meddling into matters you don't know a blessed thing about? You've succeeded in doubling the difficulty of my job."

Tommy hung his head. "I'm awfully sorry, sir. I had no idea——"

Mr. Burroughs was harassed by circumstances the more distressing for their intangibility and vagueness. And being quite human he tried to solace himself by venting his anger on the nearest individual.

"I'd have had this thing settled by now if it wasn't for you," he complained unreasonably.

Tommy realized that it was imperative that he reestablish himself in some measure. And he was hurt at the gross injustice of his condemnation.

"Isn't it possible to settle it — still?" he inquired timidly.

Burroughs halted in his restless pacing of the office, and stared balefully. "*Another* brilliant idea!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "What is it this time?"

Tommy hesitated. "It — it's pretty vague. I've only been thinking that — well, why not take the men back and ——"

Burroughs threw himself into a chair, his mouth open. "Yes, go on. This is immense! What luck to have a genius around the place. Go on! The suspense is killing me!" He laughed harshly, and the color in Tommy's cheeks deepened.

But what was in his mind was too vital, and the product of too much pondering, for him to withhold it before mere hostility and sarcasm. "I don't mean to take them back and give in absolutely," he went on doggedly. "I mean ——"

Burroughs broke in, sneering: "Not absolutely, eh? Well, what *do* you mean?"

Tommy ignored the churlish interruption. He continued, with lips compressed: "I mean — to start all over, differently."

"Start over, eh? You might be more definite."

"I don't know enough to be definite," said Tommy sincerely. "I — I've just got a sort of hunch."

"Which is?"

"Well, what's the war in Europe about? It's for democracy, isn't it? I can't help thinking that the strike's for the same thing. If we're for democracy, when it comes to the Allies, maybe we ought to be for it right here — under our noses."

"Yes, go on." A shade of perplexity flitted over Burroughs' features.

Tommy was warming to his subject, its inchoate formlessness crystallizing under expression. "I don't say dicker and give in. I say how about a new deal — *entirely*. Let's establish a little democracy right here. Profit sharing and all that's good enough as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough — not nearly. It really isn't *sharing*, you know. It's just getting a reward — a gift."

Mr. Burroughs chewed his cigar. "You recommend that they share losses as well as profits — become stockholders actually."

"No," said Tommy thoughtfully. "That wouldn't be fair, either. A chap with an investment of a hundred dollars isn't able to stand a loss as well as a chap with a million. And if the hundred dollars is his only capital, he can't stand a loss at all. No, you've got to have wages — a fixed minimum."

"Then you really don't advocate actual sharing in the business?"

"Not financially — no. But I think there ought to be more sharing in policy and all that. Why

can't a business be run the way a nation is — *this* nation? Here we are, anti-German because Germany isn't democratic, and yet we run our businesses on worse than German lines! Why can't we make business really democratic, and cut out all this scrapping and waste and suspicion and ——"

Mr. Burroughs smiled quizzically. "You'd have these teamsters and packers and what not all get together and elect officers, I suppose. Decide how much they'd work? And for how much?"

Tommy, unconscious of the irony of the questions, broke in eagerly: "That's it exactly! They'd elect their own leaders and be responsible themselves for working conditions. Then they'd really be part of the show. Agitators like Moran wouldn't have a chance. Every man would consider the Champion Paint Company as *himself*. You wouldn't be 'boss.' You'd be — well, president, and ——"

"You think they'd elect me?"

"Why, of course. You're their best bet."

Mr. Burroughs' whimsical smile vanished, and his face clouded. "Well — they wouldn't! They'd elect some smooth scamp who flattered them. They'd decide to work two hours a day. They'd — why, in three weeks they'd all be quitting to get a job somewhere else, because this concern would be broke! Cass, the best I can say for you is that you're about five thousand years ahead of your time."

"I don't believe it," declared Tommy stoutly. "I know those lads. They're not such fools as you might think. They'd elect the best men they could find, just as we try to elect the best men to govern our cities."

Burroughs laughed. "Splendid! And we get such perfect government, don't we? Boodlers, incompetents——"

Tommy protested. "That's not the fault of the *principle!* Maybe we do have punk government. But it's getting better all the time."

"I doubt it," growled Burroughs.

Tommy's mind was singularly direct and penetrating at times. "Grant that," he said, "but isn't it better to have a punk government that we've all got a finger in than a better one that we haven't anything to do with—and revolutions brewing all the time?"

"I fail to see any connection," said Mr. Burroughs coldly.

Tommy was undeterred. "It's the same thing. These fellows aren't striking merely for a certain increase in pay——"

"They said they were."

"I know. But even if they get it they won't be satisfied."

"Why not?"

"Because they're not trying to get so much and

no more — but *all*. Pretty soon there'd be another strike, and another, until they'd bled the business dry. They aren't reasonable. They aren't loyal. They don't give a darn whether the business suffers or not. It's something they don't belong to; they *hate* it. But no matter how they fight they can't really win."

"Ah — you admit that?"

"Sure. Maybe they'll get their advance. But they'll pay a big price for it!"

"You can bet they will!" snarled Burroughs savagely.

"Yes, they will — a big one." Tommy hesitated, biting his lip. "But you — *you* can't win, either. It's bound to be a draw."

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean that, just like them, you have to pay an awful price for what you get. More than that, you can't win *for good*. It isn't a case of peace with occasional rows. It's war all the time with occasional peace. I know those fellows, Mr. Burroughs. I've worked with 'em. I know how they feel. They haven't any love for you."

"Do I want their precious love?"

Tommy shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe not. But that's not the point."

"What is?" The question was clipped off brusquely.

"Why — that they haven't any loyalty for the company; that's the point. They're not part of it, I tell you. They hate it, like Uncle Tom hated Simon Legree. Machines can't hate. Give 'em oil and they'll do their best for you. But these fellows aren't machines. They don't do their best the way things are now. They never will, as long as ——"

"Labor," began Mr. Burroughs heavily, "is ——"

Tommy cut him short. "That's just the trouble," he cried hotly. "You think of those fellows as 'labor.' But they aren't labor. They're human beings — just like you and me. You've got to get together with 'em — treat 'em like equals. They've got pride."

Mr. Burroughs bit off the end of a fresh cigar. "Umn!" he said thoughtfully. His mind persisted in wandering from the subject in hand. It was curious, but he was thinking rather more of Tommy's appearance than of what he said. The lad's unblemished skin glowed with his enthusiasm, and the white teeth sparkled in a smile which was undeniably pleasing. The boy was good to look upon; there was no question of that.

That fact led to another fact. Mr. Burroughs' jaw hardened. His eyes closed, and a picture formed in his memory. It was not a pleasant picture. It is never pleasant for a man to recall the circumstances of defeat. There had been a singular

finality to Anne's words. Always before there had been a tenuous suggestion of mere procrastination. But that suggestion existed no longer. She had been very gentle, regretful even; but she had been positive. He knew, in his heart, that the hope was dead. He was even resigned to it. But the wound was still too fresh for him to be tolerant of the hand which, he knew, had inflicted it. In a word and to be specific, Mr. Burroughs was jealous.

He opened his eyes and fixed them upon Tommy, staring at him almost incredulously. A white anger fumed in their depths. "Has it occurred to you, Cass," he inquired smoothly, but with a bitter passion trembling in the words, "that in telling me how this business should be run you have been — just a little — shall we say, *presumptuous?*"

Tommy was surprised, and showed it. "Why, n-no," he stammered, flushing. "I certainly didn't mean to be."

"You know what hell is paved with!" snapped Burroughs. "The fact remains that you have the colossal nerve to pick flaws in the methods of very much older and wiser men."

Tommy felt profoundly humiliated. "I'm awfully sorry, sir. I didn't mean anything like that. I was merely trying to figure out something that would suit everybody. Something's wrong — somewhere. You've got to admit that. It must be pretty

bad when men'll do murder on account of it."

Mr. Burroughs leaned back and puffed steadily at his cigar. He found it impossible to look at the handsome lad before him and control his feelings.

"When you came here, Cass," he said presently, as if to himself, "I had high hopes for you. You were serious and intelligent. I may say that I took more interest in you than in any one I ever had here. I made a deliberate effort to teach you the business thoroughly. There was a big place waiting for you."

"I—I certainly appreciated it, too," breathed Tommy huskily.

Mr. Burroughs' voice grew harder. "You made a fine start. But somewhere, somehow—you got off the track. You will remember that I warned you more than once. I saw the danger. But you didn't choose to listen. You got deeper and deeper into a line of thought that—that leads nowhere."

"I meant to do right," said Tommy meekly.

"No doubt. But that doesn't alter the fact that you have succeeded merely in convincing me that—that my hopes for you were unfounded."

"Yes, sir," muttered Tommy, his heart like a ball of lead.

"You might have gone far, Cass—very far. But apparently you preferred to waste your time and ability dreaming of meaningless Utopias. This

is a hard business, my boy, and a hard world. It demands concentration. And it demands loyalty, of a sort you don't understand. I'm sorry; it's needless for me to say so. I'm sorrier than I can tell you. But your usefulness with us is at an end."

Tommy choked, and the tears started into his eyes. "You mean—I——"

Mr. Burroughs' head inclined. There was no mistaking his meaning. "I want you to stay, of course, until you make another connection."

For a moment Tommy sat staring, wide-eyed, at the figure across the desk. A flood of protest trembled on his lips, but he was too stunned for utterance. Then all control deserted him suddenly, and he fled without speaking.

Straight to the cellar and the solitude of the coal bunkers he went. And there, for a minute or two, he gave himself up to the agony of his humiliation. Tears there were, and a few bitter, if half-hearted, curses. He was more hurt than chagrined. Then presently, when the sharpness of the blow had dulled a little, he dried his eyes, properly ashamed of his unmanly weakness, and went upstairs in search of the sympathy he knew so well where to find.

Anne's reception of the dismal intelligence was gratifying. It soothed his tortured pride. She was very angry. She said things about Mr. Burroughs which even he had not thought to say. She imputed

motives to the unhappy man, and charged him with a profundity of folly, which to Tommy was as shocking as it was comforting.

Her defense of his own motives was enormously pleasing. She understood so wonderfully. But he did not guess how vastly much more she understood than he thought she did. Intuitively she had grasped the real explanation of Mr. Burroughs' action, and she knew that the slightest hint of it would drive the shadows from the boy's eyes; but for reasons good and sufficient to herself she did not give the hint.

She did, however, give free and eloquent rein to her resentment. Indeed, she espoused Tommy's cause with such fervor that in simple fairness he felt constrained to disagree.

He grinned weakly. "Hold on, old girl! I'm not a saint, you know. In fact, I guess I've been a good deal of a darned fool."

"You haven't at all!" she declared stoutly. "It's simply that in a world of blind men any one with eyes is unpopular."

He shook his head. "No, sir. I butted in where it wasn't my business. I *am* just a kid, you know. And I *did* have nerve telling Burroughs how he ought to run things. I guess I got what was coming to me all right."

She would not listen to his deprecation of himself. "You're the most valuable person in the com-

pany," she insisted with conviction. "You're the only one who can see ahead of his nose."

"What makes you think that?" he queried, smiling at her earnestness.

"Because," she replied, "they're treating you just like prophets are always treated."

He laughed unaffectedly. "Me? A prophet? Gee, Anne — you don't care what you say, do you!"

"It's the meanest thing — so wretchedly silly, treating you like this!" she cried resentfully. "It's too exasperating! I think I'll have a talk with Mr. Burroughs myself."

He seized her wrist, his face aghast. "Oh, no — you wouldn't do that!" he exclaimed in frank alarm. "I've got to stand on my own feet at least. Promise me you won't!"

His apprehension was manifestly sincere, and she acquiesced, though reluctantly. "Maybe you're right, but I don't think he realizes what a foolish thing he's doing." That was not true. She knew that Mr. Burroughs quite understood what he was doing. But it was not essential that Tommy should know that.

Tommy sighed. "Well, now that I'm fired, I suppose I can smoke a cigarette," he said with a doleful chuckle, fumbling through his pockets. "Only, I haven't got one. So much for good habits, eh?"

"I — I'm terribly sorry," she whispered, coming over to him. Her eyes were moist.

"You needn't be," he responded a trifle bitterly. "I've learned my lesson. Next time I won't monkey with things that don't concern me. It's the innocent bystander that gets stung every time."

A faint smile curved her trembling lip, and she shook her head. "You might be happier if that were true, Tommy. But it isn't true. You'll keep on meddling — though that isn't the right word — wherever you are. That's your destiny, boy."

"It's a swell destiny!" he growled.

"None could be finer," she said gently. "Those clear eyes of yours are going to see what older men never dream of. And that honest tongue is going to say what wiser men are afraid to say. Yes, Tommy, because you're a prophet and poet——"

He laughed derisively. "Me — a poet? Don't kid me, Anne."

"I'm not. It's the truth. This dirty toiling world has need of such as you. But it doesn't know it. And it'll treat you badly. It — it won't understand. That's the pity of it. But you won't stop because of that?"

He studied his finger tips. "I suppose not," he muttered wearily. "I just can't help being a poor darned nut." A thought struck him, sickening, like a blow in the stomach. "Poor old dad! It'll be an

awful disappointment to him."

She put her hand on his shoulder tenderly. "Your father is a very wise old man, Tommy. Very, very wise. Disappointed? No, I don't think he'll be that."

"You don't know him, Anne. He—he's hoped a lot from me. And now——" Tommy choked, unable to go on.

She clapped her hands. "Keep your head up, boy. You're not going to quit the race because you're tripped at the start!"

His eyes looked into hers, full of pain. "I suppose you're disappointed, too," he said miserably. "A long time ago you told me I was headed for this. You think I'm an ass, don't you?"

She smiled quizzically. "I'm not going to tell you what I think of you—but it isn't *that!*"

Her words told nothing, but her tone was eloquent. His eyes lighted up. "Anne!" He sprang to his feet, his heart leaping.

Her upraised hand checked him. "I'm awfully busy this morning," she said dryly, her hands flitting restlessly among the papers on her desk. "If you'll——"

He bowed stiffly, and his face darkened. "I beg your pardon," he muttered. Without speaking again, he went out of the office.

The sound of the door closing upon him was the

signal for a profound change in her. An unsteady laugh trembled on her lips. "Oh, Tommy," she whispered, "you dear *stupid!*" Her head fell forward among the papers, and her shoulders heaved with something which was not laughter.

CHAPTER XV

ANNE'S emotional tempest was as brief as it was violent; for in telling Tommy that she was busy she had spoken the literal truth. An extraordinarily important matter demanded her attention — a matter strangely enough in no way concerned with the affairs of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company.

A picture was vivid in her memory of a white-haired old man, speciously stern, puffing at his cigar before the glowing embers in a rough stone fireplace. Even his words were indelible in her mind: "Whatever befalls my boy — of good or ill — you will tell me *first.*"

It had been an almost sacred charge. And the time had come to fulfill it. Poising her pen, she thought for a moment. What she had to say was not easily expressed. But presently she began to write.

She told of the misadventure which had befallen Tommy. She told it in great detail, with its background and all that led up to it, because that was essential to anything like comprehension. Of the one aspect to Mr. Burroughs' action which she alone

fully grasped she said nothing. And she thought she said nothing in particular about herself. But it is not possible to write a dozen words, let alone a thousand or more, without telling a great deal about oneself.

Mr. Cass received Anne's letter at his office in the morning. It came as a shock, as Tommy had dolefully foretold it would. On the other hand, however, it was, at worst, the shock of a presentiment realized. It was a summons to action — not unexpected. The emergency it announced had been long prepared for. All that was necessary was to touch the proper buttons, give an order or two, and allow the carefully formulated plan to take effect. A pensive rereading of one or two portions, a few moments' deep thought, and he was ready for action. He summoned his secretary.

"The papers relating to the Champion Paint and Varnish Company, please."

When she returned with the envelope, he dictated a telegram which was, in effect, the mobilization of his forces. He had already telephoned his home, with instructions for the packing of his bag, and meeting him at the station. Within the hour every needful preliminary accomplished, he was browsing through the magazines, quite his usual placid self, in the smoker of the train to Chicago.

Immediately upon arriving, he called up Anne,

asking her to join him in his belated dinner downtown. Then, pending her arrival, he used the telephone to put the finishing touches on his almost completed campaign.

When she joined him his keen eye immediately understood that she had come straight from the office, and it was his tactful suggestion that they dine in some quiet place rather than in the noise, perfume, and low neck of the hotel.

"There's only one place in Chicago," he declared, "where they serve good food *gently*. Shall we see what Hieronymus can do for us at the Tip Top?"

She smiled at his youthfulness. "I like it there, too."

"I shall reward myself for this hasty trip," he said when they were seated in a corner where the music drifted to them pleasantly subdued, "with oysters baked in their shells, peacefully reposing in hot salt — a true poem! And you, Miss Manard?"

While she studied the menu he studied her, chatting easily the while. "The only place in America," he said when the waiter had gone, "where one can have music with one's meals — and enjoy both."

"They seem to find good music popular here," she agreed. "It's a relief."

"Tell me," he shot at her suddenly, "what sort of a person is this Mr. Burroughs?"

She was taken aback, and showed it. Her hesi-

tancy and the slight flush of color which tinged her cheeks were not lost on the shrewd old eyes watching her.

"Why — he's a — a very able man."

"A worshiper of 'scientific management,' isn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose you'd call him that."

"Hum! I know the type. They — ah — mentally, I have always catalogued this steak Imperial, sauce *piquante,* in my private gallery of old masters. The chef merits a *cordon bleu!*"

Before she could respond to this characteristically abrupt change of subject he had reverted to Mr. Burroughs. "I've seen something of his kind. They don't realize that there's such a thing as being too logical. Even in my business ——"

"What *is* your business, Mr. Cass?"

His eyelids fluttered. "Oh, I work in a bank. Been there all my life. Old and trusted employee." The way he said it made her think of the impassive men behind the cages to whom she said "good morning" and "thank you" once or twice a month — and never thought of otherwise. Automata, stamping pass books, and moving little piles of money about. She decided that Mr. Cass must be such a one, perhaps a veteran assistant cashier, which was precisely what he wished her to decide.

For a time he talked upon indifferent topics, grad-

ually penetrating her reserve, and, before she realized it, leading her on to tell considerably more about herself than would have been her preference. By the time the coffee was served he had seen very deeply into the soul of Anne Manard. What he saw made him express profound satisfaction — with his cigar.

He leaned back, studying her through the veil of smoke which drifted up from his nostrils. "Tell me," he said suddenly, "do you think Tom will be a successful man?"

"What do you mean by success?" she countered.

"That's a fair question," he agreed. "And important. Well, let's leave money out of it."

"Then he's successful now," she answered slowly.

"Umph!" Mr. Cass was impassive. "Sentimentally, you mean?"

"You said you'd leave money out of it."

"Yes. But if money isn't enough, neither is sentiment. There are good men in the poorhouse — and avarice sometimes leads to the penitentiary. Let me ask you this: Could the boy's ideas be made to square with the running of a business that stayed out of the hands of the receiver?"

She pondered the question. Then she shook her head. "I'm sorry," she said sadly. "I haven't the least idea."

"The only way to find out would be to try, eh?"

"I suppose it would."

"Umph!" Mr. Cass was silent for a moment, seemingly intent on nothing but his cigar. Then he came out with one of his abrupt questions: "Aside from his nonsense, the boy's got brains, don't you think?"

"Indeed, yes — a great deal."

"This jolt may turn out a good thing for him, eh? Knock some of the sentiment out of him — what d'you say?"

She shook her head. "Nothing will knock that out of him," she said earnestly. "That is, I hope nothing will. It's the finest thing he has."

"It hasn't done much for him yet, has it?" he snapped gruffly. "Made him nearly lose his life. And thrown him out of a good job."

"No," she answered dreamily. "Perhaps not. But aren't there bigger things than jobs — life even?"

He smiled. "You're a bit of a sentimentalist yourself, aren't you?"

A far-away look came into her eyes. "If I am, Tommy had a good deal to do with it. Did — did he ever tell you about the — the green scarf?"

Mr. Cass chuckled dryly. "No. He's never confided much in me about his wearing apparel."

"He hasn't got it yet," she said seriously. "But he thinks he *sees* it." Observing the old man's

frank amazement, she laughed. "Maybe you'll think it's funny, but it's very vital to him." In a few words, but words redolent with sympathy and understanding, she sketched the quaint conceit which had run through the warp and woof of Tommy's life like a bright-colored thread. Though she was scarcely aware of it, the fancy had come to mean almost as much to her, and she spoke with quiet eloquence.

When she had finished, the old man laid down his cigar. "I'm much too old to scoff at ideals, however fanciful," he said soberly. "You were afraid I'd laugh, weren't you? What a fool I'd be if I did!"

The realization of her earnestness made her suffer a little embarrassment. "It—it sounds rather silly, telling it. I——"

He rose. "I have tickets for Maude Adams," he said, as if he had not heard her. "Shall we go now?"

Tommy was amazed, when he answered a telephone call next morning, to hear his father's voice.

"Wh-what the dickens are y-you doing here?" he stuttered.

"Waiting for you to come downtown and join me," was the unilluminating reply. "I'm at the University Club."

The click at the other end of the wire was characteristically abrupt. Tommy scratched his head. It was a strange coincidence — or maybe it wasn't a coincidence ——

He went downtown with anything but pleasurable anticipations. If his father did not already know the truth, he meant to tell him quite frankly. It was certain to be a dismal interview at best, and the briefer and the more explicit, the fewer would be the recriminations. Only — the thought made him dig his knuckles into his cheek — there would be no recriminations. That was not his father's way. A few questions, a thump on the shoulder, and then crisply concrete discussion of the future. But humiliation and disappointment would be the more painful for their absence of expression.

He found his father in the club library, browsing among the memoirs in octavo, half leather, which were his passion.

He held Tommy off at arms' length, readjusting his glasses. "Your color's bad," he said sternly. "Aren't getting enough exercise, are you?"

Tommy refused to delay the unpleasant words which must come sooner or later. He led the way to a chair, secluded behind a bookcase in the corner, and drew up another beside it.

"I suppose you know what's happened to me?" he began steadily.

Mr. Cass elevated his eyebrows. "*What's* happened?"

"I've been fired."

"Oh—that! Yes, I've heard."

Tommy rather expected that answer. Yet he was none the less surprised.

"You have? Who from?"

A quizzical smile twinkled behind Mr. Cass' glasses. "Shall we say a little bird, and let it go at that?"

"No. I'd like to know."

"It's of no importance, son."

"But, father! I think I——"

"Any plans for the future?"

Tommy stared at the floor. "I can get a job—somewhere," he muttered lugubriously.

"Like the paint business?"

"Yes—a lot."

"Think you know it pretty well?"

"In some ways, yes."

Mr. Cass leaned back, and brought the tips of his fingers together. "Has Mr. Burroughs' decision to dispense with your services—er—taught you anything?"

Tommy nodded vehemently. "Safety first. I'll mind my own business after this."

Whether Mr. Cass approved that sentiment or not was not apparent. "I believe, in your very

elaborate education at college, you included the study of philosophy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you bring away from that study any great lesson?"

"N-no, sir."

"I think you are mistaken. I am quite sure of it. You learned, didn't you, of a man's moral obligation to make his own character the standard for the rest of the world?"

"Y-yes, sir, perhaps I did," said Tommy, manifestly not understanding.

"If what you do may be done by the rest of mankind to advantage, then your conduct is good. On the other hand — you get the thought, don't you?"

"Yes, but ——"

"Let's look at this thing. Would safety first — and minding your own business exclusively — how would that be for a standard of universal conduct? Things would stop moving on the old planet, wouldn't they?"

Tommy found his father rather difficult to follow. "I — I suppose they would," he said slowly. Then the truth flashed upon him. "You mean — a chap ought to follow out his own ideas, even if ——"

"I mean," said Mr. Cass, his words clipped off

crisply, "that safety first is the last recourse of cowards. Cain's reply to the Lord has never appealed to me as a particularly edifying sentiment."

Tommy's soul suddenly took fire. "Everybody's *got* to mind everybody else's business, hasn't he?" he cried. "That's what civilization means."

"Yes," answered Mr. Cass dryly. "It's precisely that. But if you get another job and try to civilize it, aren't you likely to meet the same unhappy end?"

Tommy's face fell. "I suppose so," he muttered, crestfallen. "I seem to be up against it, don't I?"

Mr. Cass leaned forward and put his hand on his son's knee. "Tell me, boy, did Burroughs do the right thing in putting you out?"

Tommy was apathetic. "Why not? I was meddling in things that didn't concern me."

"Try to be impersonal, son. Would *you* have done it if you'd been in his place?"

"Why, I guess so," began Tommy reflectively. Then he halted, and his jaw set. "I'll be hanged if I would!" he burst out. "His sense will cost him more in the end than my nonsense ever would. I know it will!"

Mr. Cass leaned back, and a faint smile played about his lips. "That's all I wanted to know," he said softly.

"You — you're disappointed?" questioned Tommy, hesitating.

"No," replied his father quietly. "As long as you think you're right — and *act* accordingly — I shall never be disappointed."

Tommy sighed. The words themselves were not particularly significant. But they made him feel singularly buoyant none the less, as if a pressing load had been taken off his shoulders. "I'm awfully g-glad!" he stammered.

Mr. Cass affected not to hear him. "It'll be just as hard holding your next job."

"I know it."

"Holding to one's ideals is always hard."

"So I'm beginning to see," answered Tommy, grinning.

"But self-respect's worth more than anything it costs to keep it, isn't it?"

Tommy nodded. "It certainly is," he breathed fervently. It was quite marvelous how clearly his father seemed to understand things which, until this moment, he had scarcely understood himself.

Mr. Cass, shifted suddenly in his chair. "How'd you like to be boss — yourself?"

Tommy's jaw dropped. "I — I don't get you."

"You might learn to sympathize with Burroughs. There's a case for him, too, you know."

"Yes, of course."

"I've always given you plenty of money, haven't I, son?"

"Indeed, yes."

"But not too much?" There was a curiously anxious note in Mr. Cass' voice.

"Why, no, sir. I — I don't think so."

"Some day — *any* day — you'll be a rich man, Tom. You're not going to just spend it, are you?"

Tommy moistened his lips. He wondered what all this was leading to. He knew that his father, for all his abrupt turns of thought, never spoke without definite purpose.

Mr. Cass continued rather pensively, as if he were troubled with doubts; vague, quite inexpressible doubts — but painful: "Money isn't what most people think it is, son. It's a weapon, a tool, a means to ends. One has to do something with it. What that something is may be very bad — or very good. Being rich is holding other people's — many, many, thousands of people's — happiness in trust. The world understands that better now than it used to. It won't be long before a man can't talk of *owning* anything."

"Yes, sir," said Tommy respectfully. It was astonishing to have his father talk like this to him.

"It won't be enough to say that money earns so much. The question gets louder every day — *how* does it earn it? There's going to be a great deal more to dividends than so much per cent per annum. It isn't going to keep a man in his steward-

ship that he renders his account in large figures. He's going to have to render it in the sum of human happiness." Mr. Cass paused, smiling quizzically at the look of stupefaction on his son's face. "Surprise you to hear me talk like this, eh?"

"Why — no — of course not. Only ——"

"Of course it does! Young people are always surprised when they find their elders even moderately up to date. You don't understand us, Tom. We grow, too — some of us. When I was young money was just — money. I needed it merely to live. But I gathered more than I needed, and I *used* more than I gathered. I found out what money really was. You think of me, sitting all day at a desk in a stuffy bank, seldom stirring out into the great, round world. But you're wrong. I go all over the earth with my dollars. Money's the most wonderful magic carpet that ever was. I'm a tremendous explorer. I build railroads on the Kongo. I dig coal mines in Manchuria. I set up refrigerator plants in the shadow of the Andes. I — why, lad, I'm one of the world's great civilizers! Using my dollars and other people's dollars. Without stirring out of my office. Under my touch and that of men like me, whole cities spring up, locomotives whistle in the deserts, ships sail the seven seas, and people — millions of men and women — have a bigger, happier life because of me."

"Gosh!" cried Tommy, his eyes glowing. His admiration for his father was beyond utterance in mere words. But it was plain enough in his ejaculation and the eager wonderment of his face.

"And yet," went on the old man, his face softening, "I'm not a young man. The old ways hold me. I go only part way in my stewardship. I build and I dig, but out of it all comes only mines and railroads and factories — material things — hard, cold, meaningless. There's something I miss, and it's bigger than all the rest — it's *people!* That, boy, is the next step. That is what I've got to hand on to you. To you and your generation is the task of understanding what really digs the mines and runs the factories. At the bottom of all this magic of money throughout the earth is the simplest and the least understood thing there is — flesh and blood. You've got to understand it. At least to try. It won't be enough to know that there is bustle and smoking chimneys on the China coast. You've got to know the coolie that holds it all up on his back. Do you get my thought?"

"No, sir," said Tommy, reluctant, but candid. "I'm afraid I don't."

Mr. Cass was not dismayed. "No matter. You will. In fact, you have already. More than you know. You've proved it. I don't express myself well, that's all. See here——"

He thrust his hand into an inside pocket of his coat, and drew forth a bundle of papers held together with a rubber band. "Unless you violently object," he said, tapping on the package with his forefinger, "I'm going to put you into business for yourself. You're young, to be sure, but there's nothing like responsibility as an educator."

"Put me in business for myself?" echoed Tommy in bewilderment. "What on earth——"

"I have here," went on Mr. Cass, unperturbed, "proxies representing the majority of the stock held in the Champion Paint and Varnish Company. These I have made over to Thomas Elgin Cass, second, who, therefore, from this hour forth, controls the destinies of the institution aforesaid."

Tommy gasped and turned pale. What was the meaning of this elaborate joke? He put the question bluntly.

Mr. Cass, quite serious, continued to tap the package of papers. "There is no joke about it, son. I foresaw, long ago, that you and Burroughs must eventually clash. I made a careful investigation. I found the stock of the concern surprisingly scattered. For a time I delayed any action. I wished to satisfy myself about you. I watched your progress carefully. Then, acting through agents, of course, I quietly picked up this stock, until I had acquired control. If necessary, I shall acquire the rest."

"For the love o' Mike!" mumbled Tommy, staring at his father as if he had gone mad.

Mr. Cass smiled. "The only nut that was hard to crack was a person named Gentles. Ever meet him?"

Tommy nodded. "Once."

"Greedy," declared Mr. Cass calmly. "Gave up his safe and sane Champion 7's to put the money into shells for the Russians. He's counting on twenty-five, no doubt. One of the pleasant by-products of the war, you see. But for the rainbow of munitions, Mr. Gentles might not have sold out his Champion holdings. However, he did — which is all that concerns us."

Tommy scarcely heard what his father was saying. He was still struggling to grasp the meaning of those crisp documents crackling in his fascinated fingers. "I — I don't understand finance very well," he whispered huskily. "You mean I — I *own* the Champion Paint Company?"

"In effect — yes."

"Gee whiz!" Tommy whistled. "Say, tell me that all over again, will you?"

Patiently his father repeated the details by which he had acquired control of the company. "I have had some experience — on a little larger scale — in matters of this sort." He chuckled reminiscently.

"You mean — I — I — I'm the whole thing!"

"If you want to use that title, I suppose you can."

"But, good Lord, what on earth will I do with it?"

Mr. Cass smiled blandly. "That is something you will have to determine for yourself."

Tommy was aghast. "Gosh, I can't!" he cried in panic.

His father shrugged his shoulders. "I'll advise, of course, as far as I can, but you'll have to paddle your own canoe."

"I tell you I can't!" wailed Tommy. "It's ridiculous. Why——" His face suddenly changed, the deep lines of consternation transformed into a curiously uncertain resolution, as if ideas were entering his head, but ideas which he was hardly ready to voice. "Do you really mean that — about my paddling the boat — *alone?*" he asked hesitantly. The resemblance between father and son was quite remarkable as they looked at each other. "Alone?" he repeated more firmly.

Mr. Cass nodded. "Absolutely."

"Suppose I wreck the business?"

"Suppose you wreck your life? I can't help or hinder."

Tommy was thoughtful. "I — I suppose it *is* up to me," he said slowly.

His father's hand stole out and found his. The

old man's voice shook a trifle. "Yes, lad. It's up to you — completely. But there are more eyes than mine upon you. Remember that. Be honest with yourself — and them."

"It — it's up to me," repeated Tommy to himself.

The afternoon dragged intolerably. He was bursting to tell Anne the dazzling news. But he preferred to wait until he could talk to her secure against the inevitable interruptions of the office.

He suggested dinner together. But she had an engagement. So he had to content himself with the walk home together.

When they were at last alone, he found himself at a loss as to just how to begin. The announcement he had to make was so stupendous that it seemed to demand preliminaries, a gradual leading up to the ultimate shock. But he was not a diplomat. They walked for blocks, chatting nervously on all manner of subjects which did not interest him in the least, the while he probed his mind for an opening. Then at length, when he was beginning to show his desperation and puzzle her, he plunged abruptly into the story.

"My father's gotten control of the company — and given it to me!" he began breathlessly.

"What company?" she asked prosaically, not at all comprehending.

"Champion! Can you beat it?"

She halted, staring at him. "Are you joking?"

"Hope to die—no!"

"Tommy!"

"It's a fact!"

"Your father? Why—how could he? He—he told me he worked in a bank. He——"

"He does. He's president of one." He caught her dumfounded expression, and, strange to say, understood it. "He's in oil, too, and ore."

"Then he's not—he's a wealthy man."

Tommy almost blushed. "Well, yes. I guess you'd call him that," he admitted apologetically.

She bit her lip. "I had no idea. I thought——"

"It's my fault," he assured her. "I knew what you thought, and I let you keep on thinking it." Her silence troubled him. "You aren't angry?"

She came out of her reverie with a start. "Angry? Oh, no, indeed! Why should I be? But why didn't you tell me the truth?"

"Why, I didn't think it was anything to talk about, one way or the other," he answered truthfully enough.

"I suppose not," she murmured. Then a sudden animation seized her. "Well, Aladdin, now that the lamp's been rubbed for you, what are you going to do with your dream castle?"

"Blessed if I know!" he replied, hanging his

head. "It's a thundering pickle to get in, don't you think?"

"It's a wonderful opportunity," she said soberly.

The steely glint of determination came back into his eyes. "It certainly is. I've got a big chance. And the first job on my hands is to settle that strike. Then I'll — what's the matter, Anne? You aren't listening."

She started nervously. "Why, of course I am. I——"

"No, you weren't." His voice was accusing and hurt.

"Why, Tommy! What a thing to say! I——"

"You weren't," he repeated. "Aren't you — you — *glad?*"

She essayed a smile, not very successfully. "How can I tell? You may be planning to give me my walking papers!"

"That's likely, isn't it?" he snapped grimly.

"Tell me some more about your plans," she pursued. "You don't have to look so solemn yet, do you?"

He shook his head gloomily. "I haven't any plans."

"Why, Tommy, you're full of them. You know you are!"

He refused to be drawn out. All the enthusiasm with which he had hurried to tell her the great news

seemed to have evaporated. It was doubtful if it could be restored. He lacked the heart even to try. A chill shadow had fallen between them, keeping them apart none the less effectually for its utter impalpability. A scowl darkened his forehead, and his footsteps echoed hers in morose silence.

"What's the matter, Tommy?" she asked timidly when they were near the end of their journey.

"I wish I knew!" he growled, kicking at a stone by the sidewalk. "You—you're different somehow."

"Of course I'm not!"

"Oh, yes, you are!" he muttered wearily. "I don't know what it is, but you are."

At her doorstep she held out her hand. "I haven't congratulated you, have I?" she said rather stiffly. "I—I want to wish you all success."

He held her hand fast. "Oh, Anne," he pleaded brokenly, "you're not going to be different just because I'm not the ten-a-week chap you thought I was? If you are, I'll go make dad disinherit me. Please! I'm just the same. You act as if you—you hated me."

Her eyes, gleaming in the dusk like two coals, looked into his for an instant. "Hate you, Tommy? I——"

Before he could answer, she had torn her hand from his grasp and disappeared in the darkness of

the vestibule. He started instinctively to follow, but the slam of the door told him that it was useless.

He walked away sorrowfully. What could he have said or done to affect her like this? He had fancied for a moment that she was displeased with him for the deception he had practiced upon her. But surely it could not be that. She could not be angry over anything so harmless.

It was truly an auspicious beginning to his overlordship, he thought bitterly. Kings were always lonely.

He had said that he would prefer disinheritance itself to any loss of her sympathy, to anything which carried the penalty of her chill distance. And that was true quite literally.

He was very puzzled and unhappy.

CHAPTER XVI

TOMMY was young enough to derive considerable pleasure from the anticipation of his telling Mr. Burroughs what had happened. But when, next morning, he sat in the handsome office which had been the scene of so many climacterics in his life, across the shining mahogany from the gray-eyed little man who had influenced him so profoundly, his satisfaction seeped away, like sand from a flowerpot. He told his story almost apologetically. So far from enjoying the situation, he was exceedingly uncomfortable.

Mr. Burroughs, rather to his surprise, remained quite silent after he had finished, chewing an unlighted cigar.

"The cards appear to be turned," he said after a little in a perfectly steady voice. "I suppose your next move will be to ask my resignation." The ghost of a smile wavering about his lips slowly deepened. If he was moved, as most assuredly he should have been, he was too well schooled by long habit to show it.

Tommy actually blushed. "Gee, Mr. Burroughs —I'm not that much of a fool!"

"You're the boss now, I take it."

"Maybe so. But if somebody gave you a yacht you wouldn't immediately make the captain walk the plank, would you?"

The reply was accompanied by a whimsical smile. "Why not? Particularly if the captain had just finished throwing me overboard."

Tommy was embarrassed. "The situation hasn't changed at all," he said earnestly. "I — well, let's say that I've just taken Gentles' place; that's all. Why, you've forgotten more about this business than I'll learn in twenty years. You keep on where you are — on the bridge — and I — I'll just putter round." He held out his hand. "Let's forget — shall we? And start over?"

Burroughs hesitated a moment. Countless thoughts, some bitter, some inexpressibly sad, were flitting through his soul. As in a mirror, he had a glimpse of himself, turning a little gray, spiritually as well as physically — getting hard and dry and mechanical. It was impossible to evade the contrast with the ruddy-cheeked youth, so eager and earnest and honest-eyed, who stood before him. Slowly, almost painfully, his hand went out. He sighed wearily. Tommy did not know what finality of resignation there was in that sigh, how much more than a mere confession of defeat it was. The keen eyes of youth sometimes see exceedingly little.

There was a difficult silence for a moment. Burroughs broke it hesitantly, a trifle defiant. "You'll want to handle the strike differently, I suppose?"

Tommy nodded apologetically. "I—I want to get rid of the scabs and the guards."

"You're going to give in, then?"

"In a way—yes."

His lips twisting wryly, Burroughs reached for the button at his elbow, but Tommy raised his hand.

"Wait a minute! Before you do anything, I think you ought to know what's in my mind."

"Why?"

Tommy's eyebrows went up. "You may not want to do it when I tell you."

"Does what *I* want make any difference?" The bitterness lingering in the words was not lost on Tommy.

He hesitated for an instant. Then, because he simply could not think, he plunged blindly on instinct—and did exactly the right thing.

"We've got to settle this right here and now," he declared hotly. "If you're going to act on a master-and-man theory, you can consider yourself fired. My dad didn't give me this chance so I could put a cocked hat on and go round spouting fool orders. The fact's this: You've got something I haven't, and I've got something you haven't. Now,

then, we're going to put the two together and play ball, or you're going to hunt another job."

Mr. Burroughs rubbed his chin. "Yes — go on!"

"I'm through!" snapped Tommy. "It's catch fish or cut bait. I've got more respect for you than any man besides my father, but if you're going to stand around and wait for me to give you orders, by thunder, I'll ——"

A slow bewitching smile came over Burroughs' face. "All right. We're on the same side. What next?"

"You're excited, Mr. Cass," said Burroughs smoothly.

"Good Lord!" shouted Tommy, beating his fist on the desk. "Cut out that mister stuff! Jee-rusalem! Can't you get it through your nut that we're on the same side?"

Like many a reformer of greater experience, Tommy was oppressed by the depth of the water when called upon actually to swim. He hesitated, scratching his head. "I suppose — calling off the strike's the first thing."

"Giving in?"

"Oh, sure," said Tommy easily, as if the details of adjustment were negligible. "Suit yourself about that, though. Getting 'em back's the main thing."

"And then?"

Tommy was hesitant again. "Gosh, I don't know!" he admitted frankly. The magnitude of his own practical ignorance suddenly appalled him. "I — I've got a general idea, of course. Democratic control and all that. I told you, you remember?"

Mr. Burroughs nodded. "I believe our last interview was on that subject largely," he said, smiling.

"I suppose a fellow could get books? Other people must have had some idea like this."

"See here, Cass!" Burroughs' gaze came down to the level, and a queer sparkle was manifest in his eyes. "You may be a bit of a crank. But you're a mighty good sport. *I'm* not — not naturally. But I'll follow your lead until you say quit — and take the consequences. Now, then — what's it to be?"

Tommy was rather abashed by this statement. It brought home to him the enormous change in his status and the extent of his responsibility. "That's just the trouble," he stammered. "I don't know — not exactly. All I want is to get the whole shootin' match into a *team* and cut out the scrapping."

"The unions will fight it, of course," murmured Burroughs thoughtfully.

Tommy was startled. "The unions? Why, I should think they'd be the ——"

"Men like Moran would find themselves jobless if you put over this happy-family idea."

Tommy grinned. "I can't say I'd mind seeing Moran jobless. And I shouldn't think even you'd mind having a happy family around you."

"I shouldn't. But you haven't told me how to get it."

Tommy paced the floor restlessly. "I told you I didn't know. I — I'm about as useful as a bullet without a gun. But here's what I'd say: Get the whole force together — department heads, hunkies — everybody from soup to nuts — and lay the general proposition out to them. Then divide up the place into wards or districts or whatever you want to call 'em and elect delegates to a council or senate or something like that."

"The council, no doubt, to run things?" Burroughs could not resist a temptation to be mildly ironic.

"No," replied Tommy seriously. "Not right away. First they've got to work out a — well, you might say, a constitution and pick officers. Then ——"

"To be responsible to the council — or to you?" Burroughs' eyes twinkled.

"Why, to the council, of course."

"But *you* own the business."

Tommy's mouth opened. "By George, that's so!" He was silent for a moment. Then his eagerness returned, and he hurried on: "That's one of

the details to be worked out. We've got to develop your profit-sharing scheme and extend it. In time we may have to turn our own stockholdings into the pot and divide them up some way."

"A detail, of course — a mere trifle."

"Sure," began Tommy enthusiastically. Then he realized the other's sarcasm, and he laughed. "I'm planning everything *but* the details. But say, Burroughs!" he burst out. "This is a whopping big thing, you know. How long did it take the old Thirteen Colonies to start as an honest-to-goodness nation? We can't work this thing out in a minute. It's going to take a mighty long time."

Burroughs followed him to the door. Twice his mouth opened as if he would speak, but closed with the words unuttered. Then suddenly his hand shot out, and he pulled him back roughly into the office. "Just a minute, Cass," he said huskily, his voice trembling. "I — I want to say something to you. I — I want to tell you why I fired you."

"Yes?" said Tommy curiously.

"It was partly because I was as nervous as a cat, with everything going wrong. And partly because I really thought you were a scatter-brained idealist who couldn't make good. But that was incidental. The fact was — I was *jealous*. I — I hated you like the very devil. And I hated myself because I did."

"But why? Why in the ——"

"Perhaps if I tell you the night before I — I asked Miss Manard to be my wife. I ——"

"The night before?" echoed Tommy. "Why, that was ——"

"It wasn't the first time," echoed Burroughs drearily. "But it was the last. Oh — one knows. And I — I just couldn't stand having you around. There now; they say confession's good for the soul. I — I think I feel better."

Tommy stood stupidly, incapable of utterance.

Burroughs pushed him toward the door. "Get out!" he commanded gruffly, with a touch of his old manner. "And forget it. It's out of my system now."

"You mean you ——"

"I mean I know when I'm licked. You — you're just a kid. But you're a better man. I — I hope you have better luck."

CHAPTER XVII

TOMMY received the news direct from Anne herself. That was some solace at least. It would have hurt much more to have heard it from some one else.

He first suspected something amiss by the way she asked him to come to her office. He followed her, all manner of apprehension clutching at his heart. Gravely she indicated a chair. Then she seated herself at her desk, eying him steadily, her chin resting on her hands.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you this — or Mr. Burroughs," she said. "If you like, I'll go to him first."

"How can I tell?" he answered petulantly. "Gosh, Anne, you act as if this was a funeral!"

She smiled wanly. "Hardly that. It's really nothing at all. It's — it's — well, it's merely that Champion'll be needing some one else to — to take care of its advertising."

His eyes started. "Wh-what do you mean?"

"I — I'm resigning, Tommy."

He repeated the word incredulously. Then he burst out: "Good Lord, what for?"

"Oh—a number of reasons!"

He was indignant and sarcastic. "One'll do."

"Well——" She had prepared carefully for precisely this question. But actuality found her none the less hesitant. It was not particularly easy for her to lie at any time; it was excessively difficult to lie with Tommy's troubled eyes upon her. "I—I'm tired of business," she managed to say. "I'm going back home."

"Then why not make it a vacation?" he demanded. "Stay as long as you like."

She began to feel her elaborately contrived mendacity crumble. It gave her a touch of panic. "I—I couldn't come back here—ever."

His exasperation got the better of him. "Something's gotten into you," he declared irritably. "You might tell me, I think. You've been queer ever since I—— Tell me, is it something I've done?"

She shook her head.

"Then——" He had a sudden flash of intuition, and his clouded face cleared. "Is it Burroughs?"

She looked away. "I—I can't stay here any longer," she repeated, her voice shaking. "Th-that's all there is to it!"

"Oh, nonsense!" he cried cheerfully. "He won't bother you. Why——"

Her self-control was dissolving fast. "Y-you don't understand," she murmured, her head still averted. "You can't."

"Of course I understand," he declared confidently. "It's perfectly clear. But you mustn't be silly about it. Why, good grief, if you're quitting because you can't stand it with old B. around—why, I'll tie a can to him! *You* mustn't go. You can't. I'm going to need you too much."

She was silent for a moment. Then she lifted her eyes to his. "Need me—what for?"

He scratched his head ruefully. "Why, because I'm starting in on the world's greatest experiment in industrial organization, as dad calls it, and I haven't got brains enough to go it alone. Besides," he added impulsively, "it wouldn't be any fun without you."

"What a boy!" she mused dreamily. "What a very foolish boy!"

He went over to her and touched her shoulder timidly. "Gee, Anne," he pleaded, "stick in the game! What'll I do without you to talk to? Don't you understand? The whole purpose of the thing is to make you do something besides laugh at me. I—I want to put a line or two on the slate, so you——"

"And the green scarf?"

He had one of his flashes of insight. "Maybe

that's — just another name for *you!*" he said unsteadily.

She shook her head. "You mustn't think that."

"Then — maybe it's something to — to *give* to you? Tell me, Anne, when I find it, and ——"

She rose quickly, putting her two hands up to his shoulders. Her eyes, looking into his searchingly, were moist, and her lip quivered. "Tommy — I'm going to tell you the truth. I — I'm not going away because I'm tired or because of Mr. Burroughs. It's simply because — because — I don't dare stay."

He stared down at her, wondering. "Don't *dare?*"

"Do you remember one of the first talks we had, and I told you why I couldn't care for you?"

He grinned. "I don't remember *why*. I only know ——"

"I'll tell you why — again." She choked. Faint lines of strain about her mouth indicated the resoluteness with which she forced herself to go on: "It was because I couldn't afford to care for you!"

"Gosh, I don't blame you!" exclaimed Tommy sympathetically.

"But you should blame me!" she cried. "If I really cared for you, I'd go with you anywhere. I — I'd be happy in a cave!"

Her head suddenly went up, and she faced him

once more. Her face was white and drawn, but her eyes, though they winked rapidly, were dry. "One more penance, Tommy — and I'm done. It's the hardest thing I ever did in my life; no self-respecting girl would ever do it, I suppose. But I don't respect myself. So I'll do it. I'll tell you the truth. I — I laughed at you when I thought you were poor — and now *I love you.* The ghastly joke of it is that you're going to ——"

"What am I going to do?" he queried mechanically, as if repeating a formula.

"You're going to think that I ——"

His dazed lethargy slipped from him like a cloak, and he had her slim figure crushed in his arms. "D'you mean that, Anne?" he cried exultantly. "You — you love me?" His voice was filled with awe.

Her head was buried on his shoulder, and her voice was muffled. "You can't possibly believe it — but I do — oh, Tommy, I do — I *do!*"

"Lift your head!" he commanded. "Now — prove it!"

The door opened for a moment, and closed softly, unheeded.

"Gee!" cried Reddie Callaghan, who had opened the door, to the first person he encountered. "Mr. Cass an' Miss Manard is kissin' to beat th' band!"

The person to whom he delivered the tidings

chanced to be Miss Gallery, who possessed more perspicacity than she was commonly credited with. "That," she said sternly, pausing for an instant in her competent typewriting, "was to have been expected."

Tommy and Anne stood by the window, watching the sun's hot blushes deepen as it sank over the purpling factories to the west. The workers had all gone, the crash of the machines was still, and the place was singularly peaceful. The twilight seemed to blot out even the dirt and disorder.

"I don't suppose Mecca's much like this," said Tommy, chuckling softly. "But——"

"You think you've found the green scarf here?"

Something in her tone halted his ready answer, and he grew thoughtful. "I—I guess not," he said presently. "I've just—touched the edge. This is a—a suburb of Mecca!"

She squeezed his arm. "It's more than that, dear heart. Perhaps—have you ever thought of it that way—Mecca's always just over the hill?"

He nodded eagerly. "And the scarf like the hay tied in front of a donkey's nose!"

She laughed. "That's hardly poetic, Tommy, but maybe it's true."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. "And you were going to *resign!*"

"I still am," she whispered. "I — I've got another job!"

"Might I ask what it is?"

"Taking care of the strangest, dearest, *youngest* boy in all the world!" she cried, her eyes starry.

He added one to the score. "I haven't got the scarf — not yet — but I've got something better."

"You've burdened yourself with a companion," she answered slowly. "But perhaps two can get to Mecca better than one."

"I am sure of it," said Tommy. "And your eye for color being better than mine, you will discern the green scarf first."

"But you shall wear it, Tommy," promised Anne, snuggling in his arms.